

Short Stories.

THE DAINTY HOME FICTION PAPER.

No. 722.]

Week ending November 1st, 1902.

[One Penny.



Before the astonished driver could protest, she had mounted the box and had driven off with her lover at a fearful pace.

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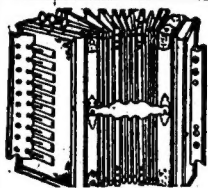
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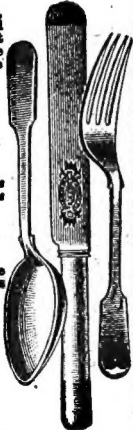
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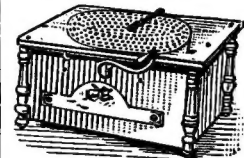
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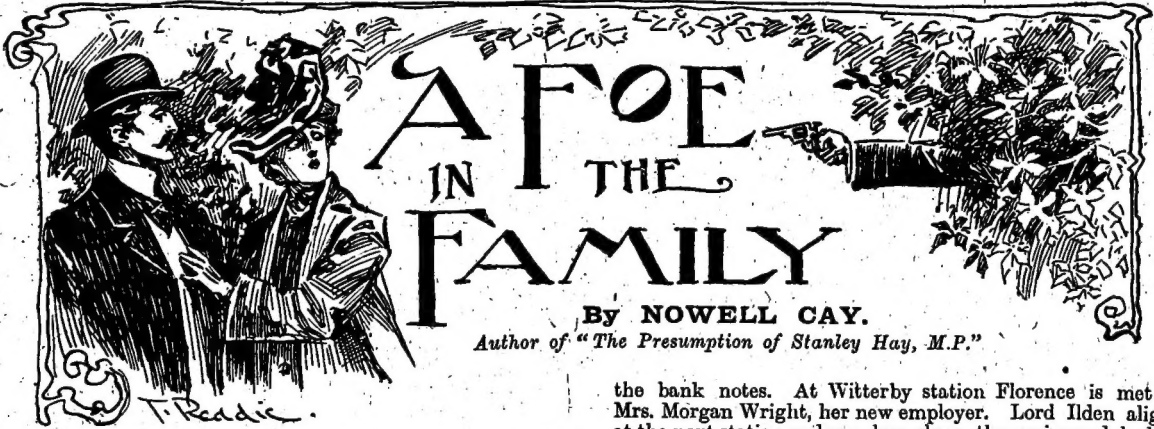
(Room 59), **HYDE PARK WATCH CO.,**
14 Ranelagh Road, Paddington, London, W.

Short Stories.

No. 722.

For the Week Ending November 1st, 1902.

ONE PENNY.



Five Abortive Attempts on a Peer's Life.

WHILE returning one evening to Pennybrook Hall, the residence of his uncle Jasper, Lord Ilden discovers a young girl in great distress at having lost two five pound notes, the whole of her wages for six months as a country governess. Together they search for the missing money; but as it is getting dusk, and Lord Ilden wants to get rid of his pretty companion, who turns out to be the sister of one of his old college chums, he manages to substitute two of his own notes and return them to her. She goes away overflowing with gratitude.

When she disappeared, however, Lord Ilden continues the search. He fails to find the money, but instead discovers an envelope addressed to himself, the contents of which he has never seen. The envelope, addressed in a girl's handwriting, is postmarked "Lallerton." Pocketing his find, Lord Ilden is lighting a cigarette, when the report of a rifle suddenly breaks the stillness of the evening, and a bullet whizzes just past him and buries itself in a tree behind.

"That," mutters Lord Ilden, "is the third attempt which has been made on my life during my stay at Pennybrook Hall."

On his return to his uncle's, he tells his cousin, Catherine Hay, of his adventure, and, feeling assured that the attempts are being made by some member of the family, many of whom would profit considerably by his death, proposes marriage to her as a means of reducing the value of his own death to his enemies. Cathie, however, refuses.

Meanwhile Lord Ilden has discovered that it is his cousin Percival who opened the post-bag and extracted the letter addressed to himself, the envelope of which he found in the coppie.

That same evening Lord Ilden's valet discovers a large quantity of poison in his master's flask. This makes the fourth attempt.

Upon receiving the news, Lord Ilden considers it wisest to leave Pennybrook Hall at once. He is driving to the station with Cathie when they overtake a man who appears to take a great interest in them. Ilden's suspicions are instantly aroused, especially so as the man takes a short cut across the fields, and is waiting at the station when they arrive.

Ilden's suspicions, however, are speedily allayed, but his curiosity considerably excited when he discovers this gentleman in one of the carriages in the train he is about to enter, in animated conversation with Florence Courthorpe, the lady of

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the bank notes. At Witterby station Florence is met by Mrs. Morgan Wright, her new employer. Lord Ilden alights at the next station and wanders along the main road, looking for a quiet inn where he could stay for a time. All unconsciously he walks back towards Witterby and settles down at the "Black Bull," exactly opposite Florence's new home. Florence, however, sees him, and that same night, after all in the house had gone to bed, sits at her window gazing abstractedly across the street. Suddenly a man in a slouch hat is silhouetted against Ilden's bedroom window. He carries a revolver—his purpose being easily discernible. Fortunately Ilden is not in his room, and, taking advantage of the few minutes' grace thus allowed, Florence slips on a dressing gown, quietly leaves her room and the house, and runs across to the "Black Bull" to give the alarm. But the would-be murderer has escaped. Florence then returns to her house, only, however, to meet her scandalised employer on the stairs. She is instantly dismissed.

The next day, Lord Ilden decides to leave Witterby and find the girl at Lallerton who wrote to him. Arrived at the station, he finds Florence, who tells him of her dismissal and of her intention to stay with friends at Lallerton. They go together but find that Florence's friends, the Despardes, have left the village.

Taking Florence to an inn, Ilden makes inquiries in the village regarding the Despardes. Failing in his quest, he is returning when he picks up a message, directed to himself, warning him to leave Lallerton immediately. He returns to the inn, and as the easiest way to baulk the designs of his enemy, proposes marriage to Florence.

(The above is a short summary of the opening chapters.)

"Will You be My Wife?"

SHE glanced at him timidly with half-frightened eyes, but her first instinctive doubt was met by the seriousness of his face. He was in earnest, and a crimson flush succeeded the pallor of her cheeks. Her startled eyes were suddenly downcast. But her voice kept itself steady.

"No, I could not be that, Lord Ilden."

The calm note of decision chilled him. He had scarcely dared to hope that she would consent—at first. But then—well, he had expected her to hesitate, and consider the proposal.

"You care for somebody?" he asked, with the sharpness of disappointment in his tone. It made her answer quickly.

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"Oh! no, I never cared for anybody—in that way. I—"

She stopped in a little confusion.

Ilden smiled persuasively. Her words had taken a load off his mind, and he was self-contained and at his ease again.

"Then, if there is nobody else, why won't you be my wife? I think I can promise that I would make you a good husband. Of course, you know very little of me."

"It is not *that*," she interrupted quickly. "I knew before I ever saw you how good and kind you are. You are the most generous man in the world, but—" she helped herself out with a little laugh—"I could not think of letting you marry me through generosity, Lord Ilden."

Ilden looked shocked at the suggestion, and tried to feel that he was quite honest in his protest.

"Please do not, shame me by talking of my generosity. I am only wondering whether I ought to ask anybody to share my lot when my object is such a selfish one. But I must try in some way to save my life and upset this plot against me. And I see no way to do it except by marrying. You see, there can only be one motive for these attempts on my life. They must be the work of somebody who is directly or indirectly interested in the succession to my property or title, and the number of people who would think themselves gainers if I died unmarried is, unfortunately, a pretty large one. Their activity is not likely to grow less so long as my life alone stands between them and the satisfaction of their ambition. Of course it is scarcely fair for me to ask any lady to marry me under the circumstances. It is halving my own danger by asking her to share it. But you have shown yourself so sympathetic, so willing to help me that I have dared to hope you would even accept this danger for me."

His voice had all the humility of a devoted and diffident lover, and Florence, sitting with downcast eyes, twisted her slender fingers nervously. If she could only believe that it was possible for her to help him and lessen his danger by sharing it! If she could only believe that this was not merely a generous disguise of the fact that he was offering her the protection of his name through pity, through a quixotic sense of responsibility for the hopeless position into which she had been thrown by serving him. The incident of the bank-notes came back to make her more doubtful and uncertain. She could not possibly accept an offer so generously unselfish. But even as she decided hopelessly to close her eyes to the wonderful dream which his words had opened out to her, the thought of his danger came back to check the answer on her lips.

How she had longed to remain with him, ever vigilant and protective. The hour or two in which he had been out of her sight had been full of torturing fears, a foretaste of what her thoughts would be if they parted. And of course this was the only way in which they could remain together.

"I ought not to disguise the fact that your own life might be in danger," Ilden was continuing. "For the first year at least we should be obliged to live in the utmost seclusion, and in anxiety as great as the present, your life being probably as much in danger as mine. They would know that if I lost you I should not be likely to try the experiment of marriage again."

He spoke honestly in the desire to be quite fair. He did not know that every suggestion of danger or disadvantage for her was an overpowering argument urging

her to accept the happiness which had offered itself to her as something too great and wonderful to be taken.

"I want to share your danger," she said, speaking impulsively at last, "but how can you wish me to be your wife when you know me so little?"

"And yet I seem to know you better than anyone else," he said smiling. "Every hour that we have been together has added to my respect and admiration for you. You are brave and sympathetic and unselfish. You have shown yourself a good ally. And—" he hesitated with a touch of boyish diffidence, for he had never been a man to pay compliments, and felt that he was expressing himself bluntly—"and you are very beautiful. I thought when I met you in the coppice that evening that your face was the most beautiful I had ever seen. It made you different from all other women at once. And the more I see you the more beautiful you seem to me. I shall never forget the picture you made last night. I want to see you again with your wonderful hair unfastened."

Her heart beat rapidly. It is sweet to every woman to hear her beauty praised by the man she admires. And yet how could he really admire her when he must know so many women more beautiful than she. She wanted to protest still, but when she tried words failed her and tears came instead.

Ilden no longer resisted the impulse with which they inspired him.

He clasped her in his arms.

"Don't cry, dear," he said, speaking as tenderly as he would have spoken to a child, and he knew that the contract was settled when she buried her face on his breast to sob unrestrainedly.

A pleasant sense of possession thrilled him as he passed his hand soothingly over her hair, waiting till her passion of tears exhausted itself.

Then he lifted her face and kissed her on the lips, and as he did so the passive inertness with which she had rested in his arms seemed to leave her, and she startled him by the intensity with which her arms clasped round his neck and her lips met his.

There was a grave light in his eyes.

"She loves me," he said to himself, almost with misgiving. The arrangement which had been so convenient for both had somehow become less fair.

A Notice in "The Times."

"On the 3rd inst., at St. Agatha's, Fulham, by the vicar, George FitzHenry Stewart Ilden, Baron, of Ilden Castle, Yorks, to Florence Estelle, only daughter of the late Charles Courthorpe, Esq. No cards."

This was the announcement which, appearing in all the principal papers, startled Society on the morning of the 4th.

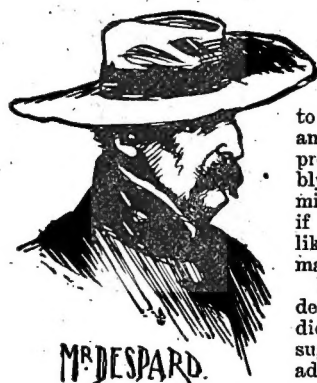
Ilden himself, who had launched his thunderbolt with much satisfaction, would have been surprised if he could have known into how many families of marriageable daughters and matchmaking mothers, it carried disappointment and chagrin. It caused a profound sensation in the homes of ladies differing as widely in social importance as the Marchioness of Dalmenay and Mrs. Morgan Wright, the country practitioner's wife.

At Pennybrook Hall the Honourable Jasper was the first to come across the paragraph as he glanced through *The Times* over breakfast, and he drew the attention of the table with his exclamation of surprise. Then, as they all looked up, he read it aloud without comment.

After which, as nobody spoke, he broke the complete silence which had fallen on the room with an amused chuckle.

"Well, there is a sly young dog, for you. To leave us without a word of this."

His wife had grown crimson. Her passion had been vainly seeking an outlet and found it in her husband's inane laugh. Her fine eye flashed upon him wrathfully.



"And is that all you have to say? I call it outrageous. To eat our bread and make a pretence of friendship, and then to spring this upon us! He has treated us infamously. But, of course, you don't care. You think it clever when he treats you with no more respect than if you were an enemy instead of his kith and kin."

The master of Pennybrook Hall was, as usual, amiably indifferent to her tirade.

"You would not have liked it a bit better, my dear," he said with cynical truthfulness, "if George had invited us to the wedding."

"But who is this Florence Estelle Courthorpe?" interrupted Catherine, unable to restrain her inquisitive wonder any longer. "He has never mentioned her name to me."

The question served to divert Mrs. Jasper's wrath into another channel.

"Yes, that creature of all people in the world," she cried hotly. "The designing minx! If I had only guessed that George was such a poor, weak creature I would have taken care that he never came here. I knew well enough from Mrs. Haydon what a designing minx she is, but one did not even know that he had met her. Oh, she knew what she was about, keeping it so quiet."

"But who is she?" cried Catherine impatiently, and the question was echoed round the table.

Mrs. Jasper calmed herself a little to answer it.

"A little blue-eyed, yellow-haired governess, if you please. Mrs. Haydon at the Rectory employed her out of charity when the girl's father died a bankrupt, and she rewarded her by setting her cap at young Haydon. She had to give her notice, and of course, now we come to think of it, George left the very same day that she did. We ought to have suspected it, and tried to save him, poor young idiot. Grant, you saw George off at the station, didn't you? Wasn't the girl with him?"

The poet answered in the negative, absently. He was absorbed in watching Catherine's face, with a fierce feeling of jealousy for the pained dismay which he saw there.

The pain and dismay were not due to his imagination. To Catherine the news of her cousin's hasty marriage had come as a great shock, filling her mind with misgivings. She had never met the governess at the Rectory, and it never occurred to her to question how much of Mrs. Jasper Ilden's description of her was due to unmerited prejudice. The very fact that she had jumped into Ilden's arms, as she must surely have done, to permit of him marrying her almost within a week of his proposal to Catherine herself—served to confirm the character which Mrs. Jasper had given her.

And Catherine's heart grew sick with the thought that her cousin had thrown himself away on a worthless woman, and that the responsibility was partly her own. She found herself asking whether she had not neglected her duty in refusing to marry George when he asked her, since he had found the step so necessary that he must needs, in default of her, marry the first girl he met.

She had not a romantic love for him; but, as George himself had said, they had always been good friends, and Catherine felt that she would have made him a better wife than this adventuress could ever do. Had she neglected her duty for a foolish fancy—a fancy which seemed destined to lead to nothing?

Unconsciously her eyes turned to Grant Ilden's handsome Byronic face, and she lost her pallor suddenly as she found him watching her with moody eyes that seemed to read her thoughts.

But Jane was addressing her. The baronet's wife felt personally aggrieved by her cousin's marriage. It was a relief to twit somebody whom she imagined to be feeling more aggrieved still.

"Is it possible that Cousin George gave you no more idea of what he was going to do than he gave the rest of us, Miss Hay?" she asked, with an acid smile. "I imagined that you were quite in his confidence."

Catherine's composure came back, as she answered easily that the news was as much a surprise to her as to the others.

"I have been expecting to hear from Cousin George," she added. "He promised to write when he went away."

"But has apparently been otherwise engaged," said Jane, with an unpleasant laugh. Her brothers cowered at her.

"He would not even promise to write to you, would he, Janey. I heard you begging him to."

It pleased Grant to think that he had done

Catherine a service when his sister subsided at the thrust.

"But what are we going to do?"

Mrs. Jasper was crying plaintively, and turned angrily on her husband again because he had resumed his breakfast.

"You go on eating just as if nothing had happened," she cried.

And Mr. Ilden answered with his mouth full:

"No, dear, I go on eating because something has happened. George is married, and it is too late for us to say whether we give our consent. For my part I don't blame him. He has certainly saved himself a good deal of worry by marrying first and taking our opinion afterwards. What do you say, Rupert?"

"I hope George will be happy," said the Honourable Rupert, rousing himself apparently from a fit of abstraction.

Mrs. Jasper laughed derisively.

"Happy? How can he be if we let him fall into the hands of a girl like that? We must do something. If he cannot get the marriage annulled, he ought at least to arrange a separation."

"But on what grounds?" asked Jane with sympathetic interest.

"Oh, they would be found easily enough in connection with a girl of that sort. It would only be necessary to show her to George in her true light, and if Jasper had any respect for the honour of the family he would do it. I only wish that Percival was here. He would soon find out sufficient about the lady to cure Ilden's infatuation."

"He would no doubt have a good try," said Grant cynically, "but it strikes me that Ilden has taken precautions. At present none of us knows where he is, and I do not expect that he will enlighten us until we have had time to reconcile ourselves to his marriage. That is if we want reconciling. For my part I am glad to hear that it is settled."

Mrs. Jasper glared at him contemptuously, and wished more earnestly than ever that his brother was in his house. Percival at least would not abandon without a struggle the hopes and ambitions which they had both nursed for more than twenty years.

She left the table to write to him, pointing out—for similarity of interests had made the two very confidential and outspoken—that an apparent misfortune might be turned into a blessing, if Lord Ilden while remaining bound to his wife, found it impossible to live with her.

She had barely dispatched it when Mrs. Haydon was announced, and came in flushed and important.

"I felt that I must come at once and show you a letter my friend Mrs. Morgan Wright has just sent me," she said impressively, "because it concerns your nephew, Lord Ilden, I am sorry to say as well as Florence Courthorpe."

Mrs. Jasper flung out her hands.

"Oh! I have heard. It is in to-day's Times." The rector's wife was startled.



"In the *Times*? Then it has become an open scandal as my friend feared that it would."

It was Mrs. Jasper's turn to stare.

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that Lord Ilden followed that girl to Witterby and—but let me read you Mrs. Morgan Wright's letter. The girl's conduct seems to have been positively appalling."

"With Ilden or others?" asked Mrs. Jasper eagerly, and her momentary interest faded when the rector's wife answered primly:

"With your nephew, I am sorry to say. But what does the account in the papers refer to?"

"Their marriage," said Mrs. Jasper hopelessly. "It was celebrated at some wretched little London church yesterday."

"Married!" gasped her visitor, and her face changed strangely.

"Yes. There is a reward for intrigue and trickery, if you like."

Mrs. Haydon's voice had grown more deliberate.

"I do not think that I ever accused

Lady Ilden of trickery exactly," she said as if weighing the word.

"Of course it would not have done for her to marry Sidney, when his future is so unassured; but for a man like his lordship I could understand her making a very suitable wife. She comes, of course, of a good family. It is not as though she were born a governess, and—well, I hope she will not be ungrateful for the kindness I have shown her; now that it may be in her power to repay a little of it. I must go home and write to Mrs. Wright. This will quite set her mind at rest."

She was quite anxious to tell the rector the astonishing news and inquire the value of the living which was in Lord Ilden's gift.

On the terrace she passed Grant, who was striding up and down moodily. He had been through the grounds in search of Catherine, who had wandered away to ponder over the news alone; but he had discovered her only to turn back without attracting her attention, for Catherine was in tears.

"What a fool Ilden is," he said to himself. "He deserves to be shot."

And he marched up and down the terrace, pondering on the irony of Fate, which only gives its gifts to those who do not want them, until the figure of his aunt appeared at the window of the morning-room beckoning him towards her.

"Your father has gone back to bed, complaining of illness," she said. "I wish that you would persuade him to let us send for a doctor."

A Call from Pennybrook.

The news that his uncle Rupert was dangerously ill and was anxious to see him, probably for the last time, reached Ilden in the first week of an unconventional honeymoon spent in an unfashionable suburb of London. It had been Florence's idea that they should remain in England, and her belief that the London suburbs are the best place in the world in which to hide had been justified so far completely. At Fulham they had been able to pass under their own names and marry openly without the least sign of pursuit, and when the announcement of their marriage, which Ilden was depending upon as the first signal blow at his unknown enemy, made it advisable for them to leave the neighbourhood where it had taken place, they had found a refuge to all appearances as safe at Sydenham.

But though no single sign of discovery obtruded itself

into the quietude of their retreat there, the expectation of it served to make every day exciting. Every walk that they took to ether was an adventure, when in each passer-by they were prepared to find either an assassin or a spy. And their common danger served as a tie keeping them more closely together than any personal attraction. If Ilden went for the shortest of strolls by himself, he could not return without a certain sense of uneasiness as to what might have happened in his absence. He could only justify himself for allowing Florence to share his danger, he told himself, by keeping constant guard over her. As for her, she was in torture every moment that he was out of her sight. She would receive



The Hon. Jasper was the first to come across the paragraph announcing Ilden's marriage in *The Times*.

him on his return with a passionate relief which showed how great her anxiety had been.

And Ilden was a little surprised to find that this more than ordinary closeness of intercourse did not at present pall upon him in the least. He had always been a little afraid of marriage, as indeed he was still. The virtual pledge that he would always take pleasure in the society of any particular woman seemed too heavy a one to give, when a promise was such a serious matter with him.

When he had asked Florence Courthorpe to be his wife, as when he had asked Catherine Hay, he had taken it for granted that the pledge was not understood. For he had spoken to neither of love.

With Florence especially the arrangement had seemed to him a perfectly fair one without it. He was offering her a position, the advantages of which, in her friendless position, must certainly be worth the risks which it entailed.

He had felt quite safe in promising that her life should be a happier one than that of a friendless governess. He knew that he would never be tempted to treat her with discourtesy, just as he was sure that with her beauty and refinement she would never offend his somewhat fastidious taste, or make him regret that he had given her his name.

But he had realised when it was too late that Florence had taken it all differently. Her first kiss of betrothal had told him that she had given him her whole heart in the perfect belief that he had given her his. The pledge, which he thought too serious to take, had been accepted without the making.

Because he had praised her beauty quite truthfully, she had taken it for granted that they were all in all to each other, the sharers of a perfectly romantic love story, and the fact rendered him vaguely uncomfortable. Without intending it, he seemed to have committed himself to play the part of the ardent lover.

Not that he found any difficulty in it at present, when his least smile or kindly word seemed to give his wife such complete happiness, when their joint anxiety for each other made it necessary for them always to be together, with no need of asking whether he desired it. And she was very charming, more charming than he had imagined. Each day revealed to him some new, subtle prettiness of thought or expression or gesture. After keeping himself jealously aloof from women, it was a delicious and novel sensation to feel that he possessed one, all his own, to study and admire. She surprised him every hour by making him feel his importance to her, and the feeling, although it made him serious, made him more important in his own eyes.

It was the thought of her possible disillusionment that frightened him. Already he felt that he would rather cut off his hand than tell her the truth, and say, "I have never claimed to love you. I only suggested our marriage as a matter of mutual convenience, because I owed you a debt and could thwart my enemies by discharging it; because Fate threw you in my path just when I needed you—a woman who did not offend my taste, and at the same time was so circumstanced that she did not complain of the conditions under which I must marry."

He could not disillusionise her like this, and so he played the lover cheerfully, and was still surprised to find pleasure in it, when the letter arrived, begging him to return to Pennybrook.

It was written to Percival Ilden, who had been summoned back to Yorkshire by the news of his father's serious illness, from the dictation of the sick man himself, and had been addressed to Ilden Castle in the hope that it would be forwarded to Ilden, wherever he might be.

It had been sent on with others by the faithful Jardine, who remained there to serve as a medium of communication between Ilden and his friends. The valet was the only person to whom the secret of his whereabouts had been disclosed. The promised letter to Catherine was still to be written. He was telling himself, as he postponed it from day to day, that it was too early as yet to brood of a settled address. The next hour might set them journeying again; but in his heart of hearts he was conscious that the duty of writing had become an undesirable one. His cousin's sympathy had become strangely unimportant to him, and she would expect him to give her some explanation of his marriage. He shrank from the task of putting his motives and emotions into black and white. Of the former he was feeling a little ashamed.

The latter he did not understand clearly himself; and it seemed to him that his exact relationship to his wife was a matter sacred to themselves. And yet he could not write to Catherine without mentioning his marriage, nor could he mention it without offering her some explanation of it. And so the latter had been put off from day to day until he understood himself better, and now it seemed that he was likely to give his first explanation to Catherine by word of mouth.

The letter had come while they were at luncheon together, and he read it aloud without comment.

Florence's face grew white as she listened.

"And you have decided to go," she said, reading his thoughts from his face as she had learnt to do without any need of words. She knew better than he knew himself that his decision was already taken, and her heart sank. This then was the end of her dream which from the first had seemed too wonderfully beautiful to endure. He would go back to Pennybrook and be killed, and she would never see him again.

"Yes, I suppose I ought to go," he said thoughtfully.

"Uncle Rupert told me when I saw him last that he was fonder of me than of his own sons, and one cannot disregard the wishes of a dying man. I should feel like a coward if I ignored it through fear."

"You do not think that it is a trick intended only to take you back?" she asked timidly. "It is written by the cousin you distrust."

The idea had not occurred to him, and she impressed him again pleasantly, as she was always doing, with a sense of her value as an ally.

But in this case he scarcely suspected intrigue. The motive was one which would not have suggested itself to Percival as likely to succeed, and he said so.

"Besides, if it were a trick, their object could only be to discover where we are," he continued, "and I shall be very careful."

The fact that his decision was fully taken showed itself more clearly than ever in his voice, and with a passionate gesture he flung her arms round his neck.

"Darling love, if you must go, will you not let me go with you?"

The tears that had gathered in her pleading eyes made him stoop and kiss her as he answered, telling her that it was impossible.

"You must remain here as my hostage, little one," he said gently. "Only the fact that I leave you hidden makes it safe for me to expose myself. I am only half a person now, and nobody would think it worth while to kill one without the other. So long as you keep your whereabouts unknown, you will know that you are protecting me from attack."

This was the thought which made him almost eager to leave his retreat. So far as the plot against his life was concerned, it seemed to him that his marriage had been a masterly move, and he wanted to test its efficacy, and enjoy the triumph which it gave him.

By going back to Pennybrook openly, he would be saying in effect to his unknown enemy: Here I am. Shoot me now, if you think it worth the risk.

The spire of audacity in the challenge pleased him, and he steeled himself against the pathetic fear in his young wife's face. The necessity of which he had always been conscious when a serious problem suggested itself to his mind, to be alone and think it over in solitude, made the idea of leaving her in a way a relief, and he was uncertain of his own sincerity when he assured her that it would be a wrench to tear himself away.

The assertion seemed demanded of him, and he made it warmly, but it was just this question of his own sincerity that he wanted to think out without the distraction of her presence. A day or two by himself would enable him to understand himself, and if he still kept his girl-wife happy, as he must do, with love-words and caresses, he would at least be saved this disturbing uncertainty as to whether they were genuine or



only the outcome of the part which he had unintentionally committed himself to play.

Florence had already accepted the inevitable, and was making an effort to accept it bravely. There would be time when he had gone for tears. At present she must not distress him or add to his anxieties by showing how tragically she felt and feared the parting.

"You will be starting at once, dear?" she asked, with only the slightest tremor in her voice to show how much the effort of self-control cost her.

Ilden was already consulting a time-table.

"Yes, little-one. The sooner I start the sooner I shall be back with you. I shall catch the express to York if I am lucky and go at once."

And so the parting, which to her seemed almost as serious as the parting of death, came with little preparation. It seemed to her only a few minutes from the time when she had been perfectly happy in her dream elysium before she found herself alone, crying her eyes out in an abandonment of grief, and feeling that the end of all happiness had come.

She was conquering a mad impulse to hasten after him before it was too late, and beg him to return for her sake, as she knew that he would if she only spoke the word, to tell him that to know that he was going out into danger alone was more than she could bear.

But she conquered it resolutely. She had married him to help him, not to be a drag upon him, and no pity for her own weak fears should stand in the way of an action which he thought generous and right.

In a fit of hopeless agony she buried her face in her arms.

"Oh! my love, my love," she sobbed, "come back to me safely. I cannot lose you now."

She raised her head hastily as a knock sounded at the door, and the landlady of the house entered looking a little embarrassed by the sight of the grief on which she had obtruded.

"I beg your pardon, ma'am," she said, "but a young person has called who says that she must see you."

Uncle Rupert Dies.

ILDEN seized the opportunity offered by his passage through London to call on his lawyer and sign a new will, hurriedly drawn up while he waited. He had paid a similar visit immediately after his marriage, and disturbed the usual humdrum routine of the office by demanding that important alterations should be made in the disposal of his personal fortune, for him to sign on the spot.

But this time the lawyer's duties were more simple, for the new will left everything which it lay in his lordship's power to bequeath *en bloc* to his wife.

In the will which he had signed on his wedding day, Ilden had contented himself with leaving Florence a modest competence, sufficient to provide her against want if he died. He had felt that his marriage to a virtual stranger, for their mutual benefit, ought not to interfere seriously with the claims of friends and relatives—chiefly on his mother's side—whom he had intended to benefit.

But the week at Sydenham had changed his views. His marriage had become a much more serious thing; for, in whatever light he looked upon it himself, there was no doubt that Florence regarded him as her husband, in heart as well as in fact, and regarded their tie as purely the outcome of mutual affection, as if the other motives were merely accidental incentives of their love. She had given herself to him, heart and soul.

She was his real wife, and, beside that tie, those of friendship and blood became insignificant. He was ashamed to think that he had treated her in his first will almost on a par with his cousin, Catherine, and breathed more freely when the injustice was remedied.

The fact that the newly-signed will would leave her, if he died, as wealthy and influential as his widow ought to find herself, served as solace for certain scruples he was

beginning to feel about leaving her at all. Her pathetic face haunted him.

The knowledge that his life had become of the utmost importance to somebody besides himself gave to his adventure a gravity which made it exciting. A new sense of responsibility forbade him to risk a single unnecessary danger, and kept his vigilance throughout the long journey more thoroughly awake than a purely selfish concern for himself had ever been able to do.

But the utmost vigilance failed to discover any sign that he was recognised or followed.

At Rickerby Junction, where he had to change for Pennybrook, his mind was well on the alert. For he was in the midst now of the neighbourhood which he had found so full of danger. The lines branching north, east and west, pointed not only to his destination but to Ilden Market, Lallerton, and Witterby. After the peaceful fortnight he seemed to be once more in the midst of mystery and intrigue.

But the return to the old excitement found him wanting zest for it. He had been conscious all the way of something lacking, and he realised more clearly now that it was the company of his wife. Alone and without an ally, his adventure seemed a dull affair. With Florence at his side it had been a romance.

The platform at Rickerby brought it all back. He recognised with something of surprise how much more interesting life had become since that morning when they travelled together from Witterby to Lallerton. He wondered that he had been so unconscious of its dullness before. What interest had he found at Pennybrook that had made him look forward cheerfully to his visit when a month ago he found himself at Rickerby on his way there. He had to justify himself for coming at all by reminding himself that it was a duty he owed to a dying man.

Even the thought that he had outwitted his unknown enemy seemed of little moment, and the ever-present sense of his duty to his wife made him glad that, so far, no danger had suggested itself to lessen the monotony of the journey.

He had been the only passenger to enter the Pennybrook train at the junction, and he was the only passenger to leave it when the end of his journey came.

He had thought it prudent to give no hint of his arrival, and he reached the Hall on foot without an incident of any sort on the way.

The sight of the place, dreary and forbidding in the darkness, struck him with a sense of foreboding. Perhaps after all it had been foolish of him to come back for a sick man's whim.

He was entering the house now, and Catherine met him in the hall.

Her face filled with consternation.

"Oh! George, why have you come?" she cried.

"To see Uncle Rupert. I could not refuse when I received his letter."

"But that was sent three days ago, and he died the next morning. You have come too late, and only placed your life in danger again."

[What Lord Ilden's danger was will be told next Tuesday.]

Woman's Wit v. Woman's Wit.

WHEN a woman has to guide a beautiful, young, rash, wealthy, and romantic girl through the troublous waters of the matrimonial sea, she is pretty certain to find that her path is beset with any number of difficulties. This is what Lady Peggy Carstairs had to do for Belinda North, and the lovely Belinda led her into some remarkable and desperately exciting adventures. We have secured Lady Peggy Carstairs for readers of *Short Stories*, and she will tell of her adventures in a striking series of articles which commence next week, entitled: "How I Chaperoned Belinda." You must not miss them!



The Plot that Failed.

A Story of Land and Sea.

"MERCY, Michael!—the last man I'd have thought of seeing in Liverpool. Where have you been all these years?"

"Where have you been, Dick? I haven't roamed very far from Tat's Corner, but you!—why, nobody's heard a breath of you for the last six years or more."

Dick Corbett laughed recklessly, and looked at his one-time chum, Michael Fenwick, in—as the latter thought—a peculiarly defiant way.

"No; they haven't; but, as that is my business, and not anybody's, just be content, my son, to know that I've been 'sailing' in nearly every sea, and that now, I'm chief mate of the fastest little fruit steam 'tramp' that trades between Liverpool and the Spanish ports."

"Have you a vacancy for a 'forrad hand'?"

"Who for—for you? Why!—what's pretty little Kitty about that she's letting you go to sea?"

"Never mind Kitty, Dick!—I'm going to sea again, because things have been a bit rough round about Tat's Corner lately."

He spoke as if any reference to his sweetheart by the other, was distasteful to him; for he saw clearly that Dick Corbett, since he had seen him last, was changed, and for the worse; he was no longer the "good fellow" of old days.

For the moment Dick was inclined to resent Michael Fenwick's evident disinclination to bring Kitty Hazell's name into the conversation, but thinking better of it, he brought his hand suddenly down upon Michael's shoulder.

"Look here, old chap!" he said, with a show of good-natured heartiness, that quite deceived the other, "I don't want to poke my nose into your love affairs; I've lived out my soft side, and don't care a 'rope-yarn-end' for the trimmest petticoat that walks the earth. If you want a berth on the *Erl King*, you can have it—I'm going aboard now; come along, and you can sign on, and finish the business."

The two men were standing by the high wall which bounds the Albert Dock, and but a few yards from the dock gates.

"When do you sail?" asked Michael, as he went up the *Erl King's* gangway.

"Day after to-morrow," returned the mate, over his shoulder.

"Time enough to send a letter to Tat's Corner and get a reply."

"Yes," muttered Dick Corbett as he unlocked the door of his cabin in the alleyway opposite the engine-room hatch.

"You can write your letter here," he continued, "before you sign on. After that, for the sake of discipline, I can't say anything to you much in the daytime—but at night, middle-watch sometimes, we'll have a chance for a 'palaver'."

Michael Fenwick's letter was to Kitty Hazell. It was not a long one; just saying that "she must not think badly of him for leaving her in this way, and that an unexpected meeting with Dick Corbett had made things easier, and the future more hopeful."

He was addressing the envelope, when Dick, who had left him for ten minutes, returned.

The mate's eyes gleamed viciously as he caught sight of the superscription over the other's shoulder.

"Shall I post it for you?" he said.

"No, Dick!—or Mr. Corbett, I suppose I ought to say—No, thanks, I've got to go after my 'duds,' to the boarding-house."

The other tried hard not to appear disappointed, and so far succeeded as to awaken no suspicion in Michael's mind of any desire to tamper with the letter.

The new A. B. then signed on; agreed to be on board the following afternoon, and left the ship.

Had he but turned round as he went down the gangway, he would not have failed to see such an expression on Dick Corbett's face, as the latter stood

watching, with his arms on the rail, as would have set him thinking that the easiness of things, and the hopefulness of the future, were not quite so substantial as they appeared to be.

So he posted the letter in the first pillar-box and the play went on.

Tat's Corner was a quaint little old-world fishing village on the west coast, where, seven years before, Dick Corbett and Michael Fenwick idled as inseparable cronies.

Kitty Hazell, then a girl of sixteen only, was pretty and sweet enough to turn the heads of more than one young fellow in the place. But from the first, Michael made the running.

One thing he did not know; that his friend was, behind his back, scheming to supplant him in Kitty's affection; using as his principal tool, the girl's own father, Joshua Hazell; the drunkenest fisherman in all the fleet that sailed out of the little harbour of Tat's Corner.

Kitty's would-be lover played upon the old fisherman's weakness to such an extent, that in a short time, things seemed ripe for a declaration on his—Corbett's part.

Fortunately, however, for Michael and his sweetheart, though disastrously for old Joshua, a storm, that swept the whole of the west coast, was the means of defeating, for the time being, at any rate, Dick Corbett's mean and dastardly betrayal of his friend.

Old Hazell with many another deep-sea fisherman, was drowned, almost within sight of land.

In him Corbett lost the only ally who could have influenced Kitty; though she herself declares to-day, that not even her father could have shaken her faith in Michael Fenwick.

Hard times then came to Kitty, and at the date of Dick Corbett's disappearance, she was earning a scanty living, as one of the many net-menders to the fishing fleet.

By-and-by, the fishing industry declined so, owing to the overwhelming increase in steam trawling, that Michael found it impossible to make a living even, while his prospects of marrying Kitty seemed more remote than ever.

Then it was that he determined to go to sea for a year or two, leaving Tat's Corner with that object, without saying a word to Kitty; or, indeed, to anyone.

Kitty's only mistake was, that she had not told Michael that she had guessed that Dick Corbett loved her; her excuse to herself being, that no word had actually been spoken.

There were thus faults on both sides, the consequences of which might, with a little mutual confidence, have been averted.

The *Erl King* was preparing to warp out of dock, and Michael Fenwick, sick with disappointment at not having had a reply from Kitty, was listlessly coiling up a rope on the fo'castle head.

The chief mate was standing by the break-rail, shouting orders to the man in charge of the steam-winch, when, casting his eyes for a moment quaywards, he saw a girl's tearful face looking up at that part of the ship.

He could not take advantage of her proximity to speak to her; besides, Michael was too close for that action to be quite prudent—so he made a virtue of necessity, and called his subordinate's attention to his sweetheart's presence on the quay.

It would have been rank insubordination to leave the ship, even for five minutes, so all Michael could do was to lean over the rail and speak to her.

"You shouldn't have come!" he said, first looking round to see that there were not immediate listeners. "We shall cast off in less than ten minutes."

"I couldn't let you go without saying good-bye, Michael."

"Yes, I know; it was wrong of me to leave you without a word; but I did it for the best, Kitty."

"Don't say anything more about that, Michael!—I just want you to promise me one thing."

"What is it?"

"Promise me you'll do what I've asked you in *this*!"

As she spoke the last word she threw on board a piece of paper wrapped round something hard. It fell at his feet, and he picked it up on the instant, and put it in his pocket.

"You mustn't remain any longer, Kit!" (even then the ship had begun to move away from the quay), "I'll remember. Good-bye!"

"Good-bye, dear!"

At that moment Corbett called him to do something, and when he looked round again the steamer was a hundred yards from the quay; all he could see being a little figure, waving a white handkerchief.

When they were well in the Mersey, and fairly on their way seawards, he took out and read Kitty's last little note of appeal.

It was not really a letter; it was just a request in one sentence.

"For your own safety's sake, dear, and for love of me, beware of Dick Corbett."

Nothing more; and Michael knew, for the first time, that his sometime friend had not only been false to him, but that he had also to fear his present enmity, and perhaps violence.

Owing to bad weather, the *Erl King* had to put in to Brest, on the third day after, they made another attempt to reach Cadiz, though it was known that, outside in the "Bay," a fierce gale was still blowing.

Somewhere abreast of Cape Finisterre, it came on to blow harder than ever, and Michael, who was at the wheel, had as much as he could do to keep the spokes from jumping out of his hands.

The night had drawn in intensely dark and cold, and a rough Biscay swell was running mountain-high from the west, to break furiously, with a cloud-mist of hissing spray, on the rocky coast of Portugal.

At six bells, first watch, Michael was relieved, and before descending to the fore-castle, stood leaning on the rail, looking at the seething, rushing water.

Suddenly a hand was laid on his shoulder. It was the mate, Dick Corbett.

"Cold to-night, Michael!" he said.

"Ay!—it is that."

"Makes you think of—of firesides, and Kitty—our Kitty—eh, Michael?"

"Let Kitty's name alone!"

"No offence, mate. But she's not yours yet."

"As good as mine. Only this one contract, and then——"

"You may never finish this one, my son; the *Erl King* isn't much of a boat; she's old and cranky, while seas are rough and winds high."

"Well, if we go, we go; but if Kitty can't be mine, she shan't be another man's."

"Sure of that?"

"Sure as death!"

"Hope you're right, my boy! Hope you're right—but—I have my doubts."

"Of Kitty?" queried Michael fiercely.

"I don't know! Let's change the subject. Come down to my cabin and have a tot—there's no one about."

Never one to harbour malice or hard thoughts, Michael assented, and the two men went below to the mate's cabin.

Up above the roaring of the elements; down below, the doing of devil's work.

Michael's lips were no sooner put to the glass of spirits and water, than he was conscious of something uncanny about it.

There was no delay in its effect. Seeming to madden and burn like vitrol, it produced an instant sense of suffocation, but fortunately not of blank unconsciousness.

Except the "look-out" in the bows, and the man at the wheel, aft, there was not a soul to see Dick Corbett stagger on to the poop deck with the inert body of Michael over his shoulders.

The crazy steamer rolled and pitched in the swell, so that more than once, man and burden were in danger of falling in a heap to leeward. Arrived at the lee quarter boat, Corbett, using all his strength, tried to heave the insensible man into the stern sheets.

Michael, however, roused back to a sense of his position by reason of the motion during his journey on deck on Corbett's shoulders, managed to shake himself free of his intended murderer, grasping him resolutely by the throat.

Corbett, alive to the fact that the easy accomplishment of his design was now impossible, fought with the desperation of a madman.

Then, Michael, gathering himself together for one big effort, dealt his opponent a terrific blow between the eyes, and felled him senseless to the deck.

Knowing that he was within five miles at most of the Portuguese coast, he sprang to the davits, let go the tackles of the lee quarter boat, jumped into her, and when the rail kissed the water, let the boat down with a run into the boiling sea.

At Tat's Corner Kitty Hazell sits, under the lee of some rocks on the beach, wearily mending her nets.

There are half a score of other women, young and old, working around her, but she speaks to no one; and, with the sympathy of their kind, they leave her severely alone.

By and by, the old man who performs the duties of letter-carrier and general postal official in Tat's Corner, and its neighbourhood, is seen to be hobbling towards the beach.

"What be owd Maartin a doin' ere now, I wunner?" said an old dame sitting close by Kitty.

The remark was sufficient to make the girl raise her head.

As she did so, the old postman saw her looking at him, and waved something above his head.

"Kitty Hazell, it's a message for 'ee," he said, putting the orange-coloured envelope into her trembling hand.

With feverish eagerness she tore it open.

It was from the house-surgeon of a large Liverpool hospital.

"Michael Fenwick brought here on landing from Braga, Portugal. Is seriously ill. Wishes to see you."

"Kit," said Michael, sobbing, in his weakness like a child, "you will never forgive me for not keeping my promise."

"Yes, dear, I forgive you, for you have suffered most."

"One more question, Kit."

"Well, Michael?"

"Dick Corbett—what of him?"

He tried to raise himself in the bed to listen to her answer.

"Tell me," he said again, excitedly. "Is that fiend, who tried to drop me over a ship's side, on a dark and stormy night—is he to escape justice?"

"What do you consider justice, Michael?"

"Death!—nothing short of death!"

"Well, dear, the doctor has just told me, that the *Erl King*, with all hands, is reported as having foundered on the same night that you drifted in that small boat to the Portuguese port. Dick Corbett, therefore, has received justice, and you and I have no more to say."

Michael Fenwick went no more to sea, for his case, having enlisted public sympathy, a few wealthy gentlemen in Liverpool, subscribed to buy him a fishing boat of his own, which he works by deputy.

A little while after the new vessel arrived round at Tat's Corner, he and Kitty were married, and so far as report has it, with the happiest results.

"If ever there were two disagreeable, hateful, tyrannical old maids on earth, those two are my step-sisters, and you know it, Miss Reade."

Miss Reade looked uncomfortable.

"As your governess, you know, Ella, I ought not to listen to your remarks on your sisters—" she began, nervously.

"Step-sisters, please," snapped Ella. "Oh, Miss Reade, if you had only been here before they came. It was so nice."

"Didn't they always live here, then?" asked the governess.

"Oh, dear, no. Their father died twenty years ago, when Laura and Theodora were six and eight years old, and when mother married a year later, Mr. Newton's mother took them to live with her. Then mother died two years ago, and father said I wasn't old enough to take charge, though I was fifteen. So as old Mrs. Newton had died a year or so before, and Laura and Theo were staying with their father's sister, father wrote and asked them to come here. They've done nothing but interfere with me ever since they came. You haven't been long enough here to find it out yet, but you will soon. The idea of taking that book away from me!"

"Well, you know, Ella, dear, it is not quite a book for young girls; but hush—I hear Miss Newton's voice. Do go on practising."

The door opened, and a tall, graceful girl entered. She looked as much younger than her real age as Ella looked older, and no one would have guessed her to be more than twenty-three or four. She looked very pale, and there were tears in her eyes and a quiver in her voice as she addressed the governess.

"Miss Reade, I have just had a telegram to tell me that my aunt has had a paralytic stroke. My sister and I are going to her with the next train. Will you kindly take charge here? I will give you all directions if you will come to my room. Ella, you will explain to father, dear, and be kind to the little ones."

All was bustle and confusion for the next two hours, and then the sisters drove off to catch their train from the junction.

"It's too annoying," cried Major Leigh, when he arrived later in the afternoon, and was met in the hall by Ella, eager to tell him the news. "Just exactly my luck. Why couldn't their aunt take ill at some other time? What on earth shall I do? Write and put them off, I suppose."

"Put who off? Have you asked anybody down?" asked Ella, who was accustomed to her parent's incoherent style of conversation.

"I met two friends in town to-day," explained her father, "whom I haven't seen for six or seven years, and I asked them down for some shooting. I suppose I must put them off."

"No need for that," answered Ella, with a toss of her head.

"There are plenty of good servants, and Miss Reade can order dinner, and chaperon me. Who are your friends, father? I suppose they are quite old."

"They don't think so," said the Major with a grin, "though no doubt you will. They are some years younger than myself, both on the sunny side of forty. It's too bad of the girls," went on the major, absently, and half forgetting his auditor. "I always thought there was something between Dot and Ashby, and it would do very well now that he has come into his uncle's property. And Courtenay's always talking about his ideal woman. I wonder what he'd think of Laura. Run away, Ella; I wasn't talking to you. Go and tell Miss Reade I want her."

Miss Reade was a weak and foolish woman, who, being incapable of exercising any control over her strong-willed pupil, managed her by means of gross flattery and unlimited indulgence. She was writing in her own room when Ella ran in to tell her of the expected visitors.



Cinderella's Sisters.

A Tale of a Pretty Little Scheme.

"And I shall have them all to myself," cried the girl, exultantly; "with no sisters to keep me in the background; no hateful Laura to look majestically at me if I venture to speak; no detestable Theo to snub me. I look quite grown up, don't I, Miss Reade?"

"You are grown up, dear," replied the judicious governess. "You look quite twenty. And seventeen is a marriageable age, you know. Wouldn't it be fun to steal a march on your sisters, and get married to one of these gentlemen?"

"Wouldn't it? And the point is, Miss Reade, that I believe father asked these men down to meet Laura and Theodora—I won't call her Dot; so absurd to keep up baby names when she is so old. I mean to have some fun with these men. Wouldn't it be jolly if I were to marry one?"

"It would indeed," Miss Reade assented.

"It is a distinct leading of Providence that the sisters are away," laughed Ella. "If they were at home I shouldn't have a chance. I should be kept in the background; and besides Laura is handsome, and Theo really lovely."

"But you have the charm of youth, and your artless ways are more winning than the finished manners of older women."

Ella did not answer. She stood looking absently at the window.

"What is my Cinderella thinking of?" asked Miss Reade, after a pause.

"Of—Cinderella," answered the girl, with a little gleeful laugh. "I have a plan, Miss Reade, and if you help me, I'll take you to live with me when I am married. I'm going to act a little comedy. I am Cinderella; ill-treated by my step-sisters, who are old, ugly, and jealous, but I am too noble to complain; I am resigned, gentle, ever obliging."

"I see. 'Pity is akin to love,' and you think you can interest these men by playing Cinderella. Well, it is not a bad idea. But how can I help you?"

"I'll tell you later. Meantime you had better go to father. I quite forgot to tell you he wants to see you."

Colonel Ashby arrived next evening. Sir George Courtenay was not expected for a day or two, and Ella felt rather relieved. One man was enough to begin with. The Major mentioned casually at dinner that his elder daughters were from home, and Ernest Ashby felt a pang of disappointment. He had hoped to meet Dot, for he had heard of the death of her mother and of the sisters having gone to live with their step-father. His brief love-story had been played out one autumn in a country house where Dot had been visiting alone. Ashby had fallen violently in love with Dot, but although she had returned his affection, their engagement was never announced, for they had quarrelled almost at once, and Ashby had gone abroad in a fit of temper.

As soon as the Major had fallen asleep over his wine, Ashby made his way to the drawing-room, where he found Miss Reade at the piano, and Ella prettily posed in a window recess. He quickly joined the latter, and began to make conversation.

"You have sisters, haven't you?" he asked, after a time.

"Step-sisters, and three darling little brothers."

"Your sisters are from home just now?"

"Oh, yes," with an arch smile, "or I shouldn't be here."

"Shouldn't you? Why not?"

"Oh, well"—a pause. "You see, I am rather young, and my sisters keep me in the schoolroom. They are very good and kind, but being quite old, they think me a child."

"Quite old!" he exclaimed. "Why, they cannot be. At least the one I knew cannot be much over twenty."

Ella bit her lip in annoyance at her blunder. She had forgotten that Ashby had known Dot.

"Well, they seem rather old to me," she said, with sweet innocence. "Laura is thirty-five, and Theo is only a year younger."

"Theo!" he repeated. "Then there must be a third very much younger. Dot must be about twenty-four or twenty-five. When I knew her, she looked about eighteen. Where is Dot?"

Ella hesitated a moment, then risked a daring step.

"Darling Dot," she murmured. "Ah, Colonel Ashby, did you not know? Dot died two years ago."

"Dot dead!" he cried, in a voice of anguish. It was over then; his dream of reconciliation. He could never ask forgiveness now; never explain away his harsh words, never hear her dear voice whisper pardon. "I am sorry to have distressed you," he said, wearily, after a pause. "I had not heard of—of your sister's death."

Ella smiled through her tears like an April morn.

"I can't quite talk of darling Dot yet," she said, unsteadily. "We were so much to each other, and I am so lonely now she's gone."

"You must be," he answered, almost tenderly. "You must miss her terribly."

"Oh, I do," cried Ella, pressing her handkerchief to her eyes, and there was a long silence. At last Ella looked up. "I must say good-night now, Colonel Ashby," she said with a sad little smile.

"Already?" he remonstrated. "Why, it's very early. Don't go yet."

"Oh but I have such a lot to do to-night," she answered simply.

"Do you still do lessons, then?"

"Oh, no," cried Ella, earnestly. "I am going to the nursery. Baby Bertie won't let anybody else put him to bed. And then, my sisters have left me things to do."

"Tasks?" asked Ashby.

"Mending, and things like that. They have taken their maid with them, you see."

"Rather hard lines on you. Don't they ever take you out with them?"

"Oh, they are very kind," said Ella, "and they have promised to take me somewhere some day, when the boys are old enough to be at school, and I am not so much needed at home."

"Rather a distant prospect," remarked Ashby. "I'm afraid it's a case of Cinderella and the cruel step-sisters."

"Oh, don't say that," cried the girl, with sweet eagerness. "My sisters are very kind and good to me, and I love them. Good-night, Colonel Ashby."

And she ran off to her room to eat sweets and read a novel lent her by Miss Reade. That lady, meantime, took advantage of the major's prolonged slumbers to nobly second her pupil, representing her to Colonel Ashby as a second Cinderella in very deed, a patient, gentle, loving, little drudge.

Ella rather forgot her part next day. Her father was laid up with a sudden fit of gout, and Miss Reade was kept busy looking after household affairs, and subduing a mutiny in the nursery. Ella sauntered round the grounds with the Colonel, chatting gaily, and then insisted on rowing about on the pond, as unlike a household drudge as possible. This occurring to her very forcibly, she made an effort to resume her rôle.

"What a nice holiday I'm having!" she remarked, accordingly, resting on her oars, and fixing gleeful eyes on him. "That dear Miss Reade has undertaken all my duties this week that I may have a complete rest. Isn't it sweet of her?"

"Very," assented Ashby, thinking what a pretty picture she made in her white frock, with the sunlight flickering through the trees upon her.

"I daresay I do want a rest," she went on plaintively.

"I'm not very strong." She looked very fragile in her girlish slenderness, and Ashby looked tenderly at her.

"Poor little woman," he rejoined—they were on quite familiar terms now—"it's a shame you should be so over-worked, and I shall tell your father so."

"Oh, no, you mustn't," cried Ella, in quick alarm. "I can't have dear father worried, especially now he is ill. You mustn't think I'm complaining. My sisters are very good to me. Promise me you won't say anything; please promise me."

"I promise, I promise," he soothed her. "I won't say a word, you loyal little soul. It's hard lines just now, Cinderella, but remember how the fairy-tale ends, and this may end sooner than you think."

"How? What do you mean?" asked the child, with wide, innocent eyes, and Ashby hastily changed the subject, resolving to say nothing more to disturb her "Heavenly innocence."

The days went on. The major was confined to his room, and Cinderella, mistress of the field, was making the most of her time, and a very complete fool of Colonel Ashby. Her only trouble was that he persisted in talking of Dot, and dwelling fondly on the bygone days when he had been engaged to the sister whom Ella had so dearly loved.

"I may as well own it to you, little one," he said, one afternoon, as they strolled on the lawn, "I was engaged to your sister. It was rather a hopeless affair, for I was wretchedly poor, so we kept it to ourselves. But a secret engagement is an awfully trying thing, and I was a jealous fool. We quarrelled, and parted, and so—and so—I lost her."

Ella was silent.

"I was too proud to make any advances," went on Ashby; "and now that things are different and I would gladly beg her forgiveness, she is gone. I need not fear to bore you, Ella, by talking of her, for you loved her too. You would never have been Cinderella had she lived. You have a look of her too, at times." And he looked kindly at her.

Ella had to turn her head aside in pretended emotion, for a laugh quivered on her mouth as a vision of her extremely alive and energetic sister came before her.

As soon as Sir George Courtenay arrived, Ella turned her attention to him. He, at least, could not bore her about the defunct Dot. Ella really was a clever girl, and she knew that simple pathos becomes wearisome in time, so without abandoning her rôle of Cinderella, she kept it rather in the background, and prattled so happily and even wittily that both men were amused and fascinated by her. So skilfully did she play her part (developing histrionic talent in a way that quite dazzled Miss Reade) that by the end of a week her success had far outstripped her wildest hopes. Both men had resolved to propose for her. Ella had determined to accept Courtenay. If she chose Ashby, he must inevitably discover her deception about Dot, but Courtenay had never met her sisters and could not hold her responsible for any discrepancies he might notice between her description of them and reality.

It was evening, and tea had been brought out on the lawn. Ella's pretty fingers were busy with the cups, while she prattled merrily to the guests. Miss Reade cut cake, and put in a judicious word now and then.

"Well, you do a lot for those sisters of yours," Courtenay remarked, as Ella concluded an amusing little fancy sketch of the difficulties of getting her sisters up for a ball. "It's a regular shame."

"Oh, I like it," cried the child prettily. "And then, think how sad it must be to be getting old and—and not pretty. It's no wonder they are sometimes just a little bit cross."

"Are they very ugly then?"

"Oh, no; Laura is quite nice-looking—for thirty-five," answered the young lady, forgetting in her excitement her resolve to avoid dangerous details. "Only she has grown dreadfully stout. She has a lovely complexion, though; far better than mine," said Miss Ella, conscious that both gentlemen involuntarily glanced at the blush-rose face before.

them. "But that brilliant complexion generally goes with red hair."

"And the other sister?" pursued Courtenay. "Theo is painfully thin, and she—well—laces too tightly. It makes her nose red, poor dear. Now I must go, and see how father is, and if he'll take some tea."

When she was gone, Courtenay fell into conversation with Miss Reade, and Ashby went indoors. Running upstairs, he stumbled over a bundle which, on investigation, turned out to be a sobbing child of tender years.

"What's wrong, little one?" he asked, picking it up carefully.

"Ella slapped baby," sobbed the child.

"Ella did? Where is Ella, then?"

"Don't want Ella," wailed the baby so heartbrokenly that Ashby felt quite touched. He was trying to console it when to his relief the nurse appeared with a flood of apologies.

"I'm so sorry, sir, but I had to go downstairs for something, and Master Bertie ran after me. We're all at sixes and sevens just now, sir, for the young ladies being away makes such a difference."

Baby burst into renewed sobs, wailing, "me no want nurse; me want Dot. Oh, me do so want Dot."

"Ah, poor little man! I too 'do so want Dot,'" sighed Ashby.

That evening the major received a letter from Laura, informing him that her aunt was better, and she and Dot would return the following afternoon. He kept this to himself, intending a pleasant surprise, and had himself established on the lawn next day at tea-time. Ella made such a pretty picture of filial love as she hung about her father's chair, that Courtenay made up his mind to delay no longer, but to ask her at once to submit to be trained—after marriage—into his ideal woman. So he presently asked her to come for a stroll round the lawn, and Ella, reading his purpose in his face, rose with alacrity. But, alas! in the very act of raising the costly cup to her lips it was dashed to the ground. At this very moment there appeared two ladies, hastening from the house across the lawn to join the party round the tea-table. Ella turned white. Her father held out welcoming hands.

"The girls!" he exclaimed joyously. "Welcome home, dears."

At this moment—whence, no one could tell—three children dashed across the lawn, and up to the new-comers, uttering shouts of welcome.

"Oh, sisters, we're so glad you're back," cried the eldest. "Ella's been horrid. She's made us live in the nursery, and never come downstairs."

The two guests had been looking on, mystified, but as the ladies came nearer, Ashby fairly gasped for breath. For the lady round whose neck baby was clinging was no other than his lost Dot. As for Courtenay, he was stricken speechless by Laura's calm loveliness. Here—at least in appearance—was his ideal woman.

"Don't you know my daughter, Ashby?" asked the major. "Dot, I mean."

"It can't be," gasped Ashby hoarsely. "It isn't possible. Dot is dead. Ella told me she died two years ago."

"Dot dead?" repeated the major, stupefied. "What—on—earth do you mean?"

"But—there must be—some awful mistake. Ella told me," faltered Ashby, and then Dot raised her eyes to his, and said: "Ernest!" and he had no more doubts.

Ella, meantime, had most judiciously disappeared, and her mystified father postponed inquiries till next day. Then, however, her little brothers, who had hung about the gardens many an evening and been unsuspected witnesses to tender scenes and pathetic plaints, told enough to reveal to the astonished and wrathful major Cinderella's little plot.

Some months later, a double wedding took place in the village church. The bridegrooms were Colonel Ashby and Sir George Courtenay, and the brides were Cinderella's sisters.

Vera Serkoff.

Is Your Birthday This Week?

We have recently secured the services of a well-known astrologer, and below will be found his information for this week's birthdays.



October 28.—Those whose birthday occurs to-day will have an unsettled year; opposition in business concerns; not a good time to make changes.

Girls will receive attentions from married men, and those not free to marry.

The day is not good for travelling, dealing with foreigners, or buying property.

A child born here will be rather ambitious, active, and fond of the opposite sex. Should keep in the employ of others.

October 29.—A year of change and travel is indicated for those who celebrate their birthdays to-day. Business, health, and general concerns are favoured. Make use of friends.

Young girls will find love matters quiet and slow.

The day is good to speculate, buy, sell, and make changes.

A child born to-day will be fortunate in life. The mind will be very quick, clever and inventive. Would make a successful stockbroker.

October 30.—Not favourable for business for to-day's children; some sickness and anxiety. Landlords and farmers meet with misfortune.

Girls will find love affairs run smooth; those born near four p.m. become engaged and marry.

The day is not good for buying in the early morning, better from ten a.m. to four p.m.; good for visiting and pleasure then.

A child born here will be unfortunate; should keep in employ. In disposition cautious, but cheerful and kind.

October 31.—A doubtful time is shown. Do not speculate, and be cautious with friends. More fortunate for those in employ.

Girls born between nine and ten p.m. find love affairs interesting, but need some caution and prudence.

The day is good for dealing with doctors, military men, and shipping agents. Ask favours near five p.m.

A child born this day will be proud, active and daring; not very fortunate.

November 1.—A quiet and steady year for business. More favourable for elderly people.

Love affairs go much as usual.

The day is good for dealing with property, land, and coal merchants. Travel and write letters here.

A child born to-day will be steady and plodding. More fortunate in the employ of others than for itself.

November 2.—Go steady this year or some loss is promised. Insure against fires and have a care of mishap and law.

Girls will receive attentions and marry if now engaged.

A child born here will be improvident, rash, and headstrong. Of a cheerful disposition and fond of the opposite sex.

November 3.—A year of change and travel. Avoid intrigues and go quietly.

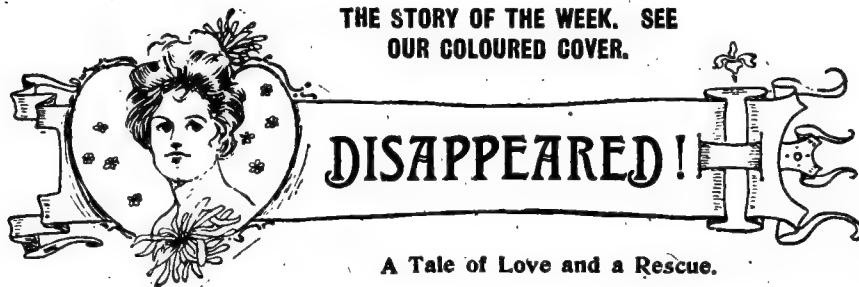
Girls will have many strange experiences in love affairs and need some extra caution.

The day is not good for new ventures, marriage, or visiting. Defer travelling and making changes.

A child born here will be of an unsettled disposition.

Asturei

THE STORY OF THE WEEK. SEE
OUR COLOURED COVER.



DISAPPEARED!

A Tale of Love and a Rescue.

A GIRL went singing down a Surrey lane, her hat swung from her hand, her face was uplifted to the blue of the June sky; the sunlight, falling across the tall hedgerows, turned her hair into a halo of golden glory about her shapely head.

"He is coming home to-day," she sang, and at the moment, unseen by her, a woman's face peered down at her between the interlaced boughs of the hawthorns on the steep bank, and a voice murmured softly, but in accents of passionate bitterness:

"Ah! he is coming home to-day, is he! And he might have been mine—mine—mine, but for yonder white-faced fool! Surely Reginald will help me to baffle them both!" And whilst the girl's clear voice died away in the distance, and her form turned round a bend in the lane and disappeared, the watching woman stole from her place amongst the hawthorns and made her way rapidly across the meadows to a big white house that stood back from the lane, and quite concealed from its surrounding trees.

"Reginald is wild about her; surely he and I can find a way!" the woman murmured once more as she hastened up the drive that led to the white house, and vanished within the open front door. Meanwhile, the girl who had gone singing down the lane paused at last beside a tiny wicket gate leading into a copse, where the ground was a carpet of blue-bells, and the hazels hung out yellow flowers amongst which the bees hummed softly.

A man stood beside the gate; a man who, at sight of the girl with her happy face and shining hair, made two quick steps forward and caught her in his arms with an eager exclamation of love.

"At last, my darling, at last!" he cried, kissing her tenderly on lips and cheek and brow, and softly caressing the luxuriant masses of her hair. "The minutes have seemed like hours, and the days I have been away like months and years! It is good to see you again, sweetheart."

She nestled closer into his arms and lifted her radiant, blushing face to his.

"If it has seemed long to you, what has it seemed to me, waiting here without you? Ah, Maurice, the one who is left behind always feels the waiting most!"

"Yes, I know," and again he smoothed back her soft hair, as they paced the hazel copse side by side; "but, Doris, it will not be long now before I can claim you for my own. In a few weeks, my darling, the little house will be ready—the house which is to be yours and mine—our home together! Shall you loathe the grimy old London after this?" And he waved his hand towards the budding hazels over their heads, the carpet of blue at their feet.

"I shall love the home I share with you, wherever that home is," she answered simply; "what does the place matter so long as we are there together?"

"We shall not be rich," he said slowly. "I wonder if you realise, Doris, that I am only a struggling artist, and that you are doing badly, very badly for yourself, from a worldly point of view; you would do better——"

"If I married that horrible Mr. Reginald Dunbar? Aunt Clara is for ever telling me I am a fool to have rejected him. Are you telling me the same thing?"

She uttered a happy little laugh, but a dark frown crossed her lover's face. "Dunbar is a beast!" he said, with more

force than elegance. "I cannot bear to hear you speak of him!" he shuddered slightly, "his sister, Miss Dunbar, is pleasant enough, but——"

"I don't know why it is," Doris answered, "but Miss Dunbar always gives me the same kind of feeling that a snake does, and yet—she is very civil to me. Both she and her brother are most kind to aunt Clara and me. Aunt Clara's cottage is close to their park gates——"

"I wish it were miles away!" another frown puckered the young man's brow. "I hate that fellow Dunbar, with his handsome, evil face and his wealth and villainous ways."

"Why do you speak of him so bitterly?"

"Because I hate him! If his sister gives you a feeling of repulsion, he gives me the same sensation. He is a reptile—I feel it, I know it! He would stop at nothing to gain his vile ends."

"Don't let us talk of the Dunbars any more," the girl whispered. "What are they to us? And I hear so much of them from Aunt Clara, who adores them both, that I don't want even to speak of them myself. Tell me of our little house—the studio and the future that is to make your name."

They wandered on through the soft June weather of the radiant afternoon, talking of the cloudless future that awaited them, of their love and their happiness, until at last Doris said with a sigh:

"I must go home now. Aunt Clara will be vexed with me for meeting you here, and will ask me why I do not bring you to the cottage. But I never feel we are alone there. Aunt Clara seems to spy upon us; and I don't know why, but I feel that she is too friendly with the Dunbars. I—I wish our wedding was over, Maurice. I have a strange presentiment that——"

"Nonsense, my darling, nonsense!" he said lightly; "you are over-wrought, tired. I love our meeting-place here! It is far better than the cottage and your aunt's coldness and evident dislike of me. I must return to town to-night. Wright expects me, and to-morrow I have a hard day before me. A millionaire is coming to have his portrait painted. There! Sweetheart, a successful portrait of a rich man may be the beginning of our fortune."

"Come again soon," she said wistfully looking up at him with troubled eyes. "I am frightened when you are not near; when I am with you all is well."

By this time they had left the copse and were strolling up the lane down which Doris had come, in the direction of the cottage where she and her aunt lived together.

Just at the bend in the lane where, three hours before, the woman's face had watched Doris through the hedge the lovers now parted, in a long, clinging farewell, and then Maurice Ransome walked quickly in the direction of the railway station, whilst Doris walked slowly home, the song no longer on her lips, her face downbent and troubled.

She could not account, even to herself, for the strange feeling of desolation and misery that haunted her as she passed up the lane down which she had gone so gaily only such a little time before. A weight lay upon her heart, yet she could not discover any reason for its presence. To be sure, her aunt—Miss Clara Browne, with whom she lived—did not approve of her marriage with the rising young artist, Maurice Ransome. But the disapproval was based only on worldly grounds, and now that the wedding was actually fixed to take place three weeks hence, Doris felt that her forebodings were ridiculous and unreasonable.

She and Maurice had met for the first time only a few months before, when he had been staying in the neighbourhood, and their love had sprung into being on that very first occasion.

In spite of Miss Browne's strenuous opposition the young people had not allowed the grass to grow under their feet;

their engagement was soon announced, and now Doris's busy fingers had already made many of the gowns that she would wear as Maurice's wife. She entered her aunt's cottage on that June evening with lagging steps, and her heart beat in odd, frightened beats when from the drawing-room she caught the sound of a voice that always had a strange power of stirring her to an incomprehensible fear and repulsion. The voice was a little raised, Doris plainly heard the words, "My brother is a very determined man. He is mad about your niece—quite mad; he intends—"

The speech did not end, for Doris flung open the door and walked into the drawing-room with head uplifted and eyes blazing brilliantly. Her aunt, a small, mean-looking woman with close-set eyes and a hard mouth, sat by the window; and opposite to her was a tall woman whose dark, handsome face might have compelled reluctant admiration, but whose sparkling eyes and thin lips gave one also a dim feeling of repulsion.

"Good evening, Miss Dunbar," Doris said coldly. "I am afraid I am interrupting an interesting discussion?" and she looked with a little smile from the visitor's handsome, evil face to her aunt's embarrassed countenance.

"Not at all, Miss Maitland," Miss Dunbar answered smoothly. "I was having a friendly chat with your aunt. You have been rambling in the lanes, no doubt?" Her keen eyes looked sharply into Doris's indignant ones.

"I have been with my betrothed, Mr. Ransome," the girl said quietly, "he comes down from town every now and then to see me."

Miss Dunbar's eyes flashed, an evil smile showed on her thin lips. "Your wedding day is fixed, I suppose?" she said.

"Yes, it is fixed for the 14th of July."

"And will Mr. Ransome still work in the studio of his friend, Mr. Wright? They are both friends of ours, you know."

The visitor's eyes seemed as though they were trying to penetrate to the very thoughts in Doris' brain, but the girl's face and voice were calm.

"Yes, I fancy that your friend Maurice and Mr. Wright have found a house with a studio; he will only be with Mr. Wright until we are married."

At the last words a kind of spasm swept over the elder woman's face; a look of such jealous anger shot into her dark eyes as made Doris recoil a step, all her sick repulsion to this woman rising up afresh. At that moment the visitor rose to go, but in spite of her suave manner, Doris instinctively realised that for some reason she could not divine, Marian Dunbar hated her, and would do her an injury if it were possible. "But it is not possible!" her heart cried out, "Maurice and I love each other; we shall soon be together for always, no one can harm us now; and yet why did I hear that hateful woman telling my aunt of her brother's mad infatuation for me—why?"

"With me you shall have all that your heart can desire; with him you will be in poverty and want!"

"But I love him! we are betrothed—our wedding day is fixed—how dare—"

"I dare do a great deal—for your sake. Listen to me, Doris, listen and heed."

"I will not hear another word—not another word!" and the girl tried to tear her hands from the rough grasp of the man who held them; a man with a dark, handsome face and gleaming eyes. "Why do you torment me?" A low laugh broke from the man who stood beside Doris in the lane beyond her aunt's cottage; a low laugh full of meaning.

"Look in your glass and you will understand," he said; "and remember—when you look—that the love of a man like Reginald Dunbar is resistless as a flood. Nothing can stay it, nothing shall get in its way. I shall win you yet!" And, flinging her hand from him, the man who had spoken turned away and strode down the lane.

"Do you know Ransome's whereabouts, he has

disappeared from the Studio for two days—missing several appointments?"

The above telegram was put into Doris Maitland's hand a week before her wedding-day, and she read it through several times, her face grown white and rigid before its full meaning broke upon her.

Then, with a wild look in her eyes she looked at her aunt, who sat in the corner of the drawing-room, knitting and watching Doris furtively.

"Read that!" the girl cried hoarsely, "I must go to look for him at once—at once! My God! What can have happened to him?" And she wrung her hands together in frenzied misery.

"What should have happened?" answered her aunt, folding up the telegram, and glancing coldly at her niece, "You are absurdly agitated over nothing, Doris. Mr. Ransome is no doubt making the most of his last days of bachelorhood. Why should Mr. Wright expect him at the Studio?"

"Why?—Because it is Maurice's working place. Because he is there regularly, he makes his appointments there, he paints his sitters there! Cannot you see that he has missed appointments by remaining away? What can it mean? Ah, what can it mean?"

And Doris paced the room with hurried, uneven steps.

"Bless my soul, what a fuss you make over a most ordinary occurrence!" Miss Browne said snappishly. "Surely a man may stay away from work for two days when he is going to be married. I always considered Mr. Ransome a very doubtful character—as you know. My suspicions are verified; it is perfectly plain that he is forgetting work and duty in a whirl of dissipation and excess. It—"

"Be silent!" Doris exclaimed passionately, "Maurice is the soul of goodness and honour. Duty is ever his first thought! His heart was in his work, his work was for me and for our home, he would never neglect it for dissipation or— I shall go to town at once," she broke off suddenly.

"And pray why?"

"To look for Maurice," the girl cried, "I cannot rest here, when he may be in danger—in difficulty. I shall go at once."

"My dear Doris—it is impossible—the proprieties—"

"The proprieties!" Doris's voice rang with scorn, "What do I care for Mrs. Grundy if the man I love is in danger? I must go and find Maurice—I tell you I must go and find Maurice, for without him my life is a howling wilderness!"

A few hours later Doris stood in the big studio shared by her lover and his friend Mr. Wright, and the latter, whilst telling his story, was wishing from the bottom of his heart that he could find any girl so beautiful and strong and single-minded as this one, to love him as Doris loved Maurice.

"I am fairly puzzled," he was saying, as his respectfully admiring glance fell on the girl's lovely troubled face, "Two nights ago Ransome went out to see our mutual friend Digby. He was coming back here to share my diggings, as he has been doing lately, till his house is ready. When by midnight he was not in, I concluded he was stopping at Digby's, but when the next day came and went and there was no sign or word from Ransome, I grew uneasy, more especially so because he had two good appointments for that morning—two important sitters, both of whom went away very annoyed. That night Ransome never came back, nor did I hear word of or from him yesterday, and at last, growing thoroughly alarmed, I telegraphed to you this morning. You have heard nothing either?"

"Nothing!" Doris's voice shook with anxiety. "I had not expected a letter, knowing he was busy. My last news of him was three days ago, when he wrote a full account of his work, of his prospective sitters, and of our future."

"He had no anxiety or worry?"

"NOW I
CHAPERONED
BELINDA"
COMMENCES

NEXT
WEEK.

"None that I know of. Oh, I am sure he had none—we were so happy!" She said the words with such pathos that Wright gulped down a lump in his throat.

"I've been round to the police," he said, presently, "and they laugh at me and declare he will turn up, that he is having a lark, and so on. But you and I know Ransome better than that, Miss Maitland."

"Yes—we know him better than that," she repeated slowly, "I am sure some harm has befallen him. There is foul play somewhere."

"I have thought so myself," said Wright, with some hesitation, "but then—why—who—"

"I do not know," Doris replied, her brows drawn together in earnest thought, "I cannot explain to you, while I feel so certain of what I say, but I say it again—there is foul play somewhere, and—I will never rest till I have found Maurice—I know he is good and true; I know he is in danger, I feel it, I am positive of it." Her eyes glowed with a strange fire, and Wright watched her in awestruck silence till she spoke again.

"I shall remain in London," she said, "I have a friend with whom I can stay, and I will leave no stone unturned to find the man I love," and her eyes looked straight into those of the young man with a glance of such high courage as made him say in his heart—"Ransome is the luckiest chap I know."

Despite many protesting letters from Miss Browne, Doris carried out her intention of remaining in London, and her boxes were sent to her there with a frigid note from her aunt assuring her that she was wasting both time and strength in looking for "a dissipated wretch who ardently wished to remain hidden."

Doris smiled sadly but proudly, because her faith in Maurice remained as ever firm and unshaken, even though the long days as they dragged by brought no news of the missing man. The police, alert at last, declared themselves baffled and puzzled, so entirely had Maurice Ransome disappeared as it seemed, from the very face of the earth, leaving no shadow or trace behind him, and each day Doris' face grew more lined and white with misery, whilst her eyes that had been so blue and radiant had grown dim with much watching and many tears.

The day that should have been her wedding-day came and went, and yet there were no tidings of Maurice. It was as though the earth had opened and swallowed him up, so completely was every trace of him wiped away.

It was on the 16th of July that Mrs. Court, the lady with whom Doris was staying, urged the girl to go with her that evening to a big reception at the house of a friend, and though Doris at first entirely refused, saying that she had neither the heart nor the courage to go to such entertainments just now, her natural unselfishness at length made her yield to Mrs. Court's pleading. "Do come, Doris," that lady said earnestly, "my husband cannot go, and it is so lonely to go by myself. Do come."

Thus it was that Doris that night found herself walking into a brilliantly lighted room in Mrs. Court's wake, feeling in no mood for gaiety, starting intently when she caught sight in the glass of a tall girl in a red gown whose face wore so haggard a look that for a moment she could hardly believe it was her own reflection.

At the same instant a voice beside her said smoothly—

"What an unexpected pleasure, Miss Maitland," and turning, she found herself face to face with the man she hated, Reginald Dunbar. He pressed her hand, and whispered in the caressing voice that always made her shiver:

"You are in sore trouble, I hear. My heart has ached for you."

Was it fancy, Doris wondered, or was there really a gleam of triumphant malice in his dark eyes?

"I am in terrible trouble," she answered

with quivering lips, "please do not speak of it I—"

"You have my deep sympathy," he replied, and again his eyes gleamed oddly. "I fear there is little hope—"

"Little hope?" she spoke fiercely, "I will never give up hoping—never, never."

Then she turned from him, and, with a swish of her scarlet gown, mingled in the crowd.

It was nearly an hour later when, seated at one of the tables with the stranger who had brought her down to supper, she saw this man fire his eyes suddenly on Dunbar, who sat a few tables away.

"Queer chap that," the stranger said, "I heard a queer story about him to-day. A friend of mine lives next door to him, and says he keeps a sort of lunatic in his house, in an upper room, and that the poor fellow is always out on the balcony at the back, declaring it's all a mistake or something, and that his wedding is waiting—the way the lunatics always—"

"Hush!" Doris exclaimed, an extraordinary conviction suddenly seizing her, "don't say anything, don't seem to notice what I am going to do. I—it's all right—I am not mad too, only tell me—tell me quickly, what is Mr. Dunbar's address?"

The young man stammered out the street and number, watching the girl with fascinated eyes as she rose from the table, and whispered—"Don't move, don't attract attention, but—Oh, God, give time!" and before the astonished man could speak or move, she had glided softly from the room.

Not even waiting to put on her cloak, she bade the servant summon a cab, and ordered it to drive from the door in the direction of the Park. She had forgotten Mrs. Court, she could think of nothing but the strange, overwhelming certainty with which her mind was filled, that she was on the way to find her lover.

After going a short distance she bade the cabman drive her to Mr. Dunbar's house, and having reached it, she descended from the vehicle, and bade the cabman do the same.

"What I am doing seems strange to you," she said, noting the surprise in the man's face, "but I have reason to think a gentleman is being wrongfully detained in this house. I am going in—will you come with me and help me, you shall be liberally paid—it may be a matter of life and death."

Her earnest pleading, her beautiful face, influenced the driver to accede to what seemed a very strange request, and summoning a passing man to hold his horse, he followed the young lady in her trailing scarlet gown up the steps.

The pealing notes of the bell she pulled changed noisily through the house, and it was many minutes before shuffling feet sounded in the hall, and the door was cautiously opened. The man who looked out had a singularly repellant face, but Doris instantly saw that he was light and small, and that the cabman was large and burly—she stepped into the hall without a word, brushing the man haughtily aside.

"I have come to fetch the mad gentleman," she said, "I have just seen Mr. Dunbar."

"Mad gentleman? There ain't no mad gentleman here," the man answered blusteringly, but Doris saw by his face that he was lying.

"Yes there is," she said sternly, "upstairs, and I have come to fetch him away."

"Hoity-toity, we'll see about that," the man began insolently, but Doris turned to her cabman friend.

"Lock him in the dining-room," she said, "and follow me upstairs." And without another word she ran swiftly up the broad staircase, followed in a very few seconds by the sturdy cabman, and by the oaths and cries of the man murmured in the dining-room.

The house was a luxurious one, on the soft carpets their footsteps made no sound, and the top of the house was reached in safety. On this top landing three doors faced Doris and her faithful attendant, and Doris paused to listen for any sounds from within either room. In two of them all was silent, but from the third came sounds of heavy, stertorous breathing, and Doris heard a woman's voice say, in tones of agony—

"Reginald is a devil—a devil! I never intended that he should be injured, I—"

Without a second's delay, Doris flung open the door, and surveyed a strange scene. In the dim light she could make out that the room was a large bedroom, and as the door opened a woman sprang from a kneeling position beside an armchair in the corner and confronted the two intruders.

Her face was pale as ashes, but her eyes blazed fiercely.

"You, Miss Maitland, and here? How dare you come into my brother's house uninvited, unannounced? How dare—"

Doris did not speak. Pushing the other woman aside with a strength born of desperation, she rushed to the armchair in which lay the inanimate form of Maurice Ransome, his eyes closed, his face of a deathly pallor, terrible stertorous breathing issuing from his lips.

"Maurice, my dear, my dear," the girl cried in anguish. "Oh, what have they done to you?" And covering his unconscious face with kisses, she sank down by his side for a moment in despairing misery.

"You cannot stay here," Miss Dunbar's voice snarled in her ear, "you—"

"I shall go at once, and I shall take with me the man you have injured—perhaps murdered," Doris cried. "Take that woman," she went on, addressing the cabman, who by this time was thoroughly enjoying himself, "lock her in one of these rooms, then come and help me."

Marian Dunbar was helpless in the hands of the burly gentleman, who with exceeding promptitude stuffed a handkerchief into her mouth, deposited her in an empty room next door, and locked her in, returning instantly to Doris's assistance.

Her efforts to restore Maurice to consciousness were unavailing, but she implored the cabman so earnestly to help her get her lover from the house that the good man realised the importance of immediate action. He and Doris, with the utmost difficulty pulled Maurice to his feet, but he was a dead weight upon them, and it was only by dint of dragging him along as though he were a log of wood, that they drew him to the head of the stairs.

The descent of the staircase was a matter of difficulty, not unaccompanied by danger, and had it not been for the cabman's unusual height and strength, that descent never could have been made. But at last, after what seemed to Doris interminable ages, they reached the hall, where by now, two female servants stood amazed and appalled by the loud cries of the man locked in the dining-room. They did not dare offer any resistance to the cabman, who scowled at them ferociously, and also by dint of alternately dragging and pulling, and greatly assisted by Doris' strong, loving arms, at length succeeded in getting Maurice to the pavement outside the house.

With the help of the loafer who held the horse, the still unconscious man was hoisted into the cab, and Doris turned to speak to her friend, and a sight met her eyes that drove the blood from her cheeks.

At the far end of the street, clearly outlined under a gas lamp, she saw Dunbar, hatless, and in his evening clothes, racing along the pavement at top speed, calling and gesticulating to the little party at his door.

"Stop him, stop him, for God's sake!" the girl cried to the cabman; "keep him away, do not let him catch us. Ah, God help me, he must not catch us!" And uttering the words, she dashed like lightning towards the cab, and before the astonished owner could remonstrate or protest, she had climbed to the driver's seat, seized the reins, whipped up the horse, and driven off at a pace calculated to upset the equanimity of any constable in the kingdom.

The cabman gasped, and then broke into a laugh and a loud exclamation:

"She's a good plucked 'un, if ever there was one," he cried, "and now for the gentleman."

Dunbar at that very instant drew near to the doorsteps. His face was convulsed with rage, his eyes glared, he swore roundly at the cabman, who made a dash in his direction;

but though his strength had enabled the latter to be of use to Doris before, his agility was not equal to Dunbar's. In the twinkling of an eye the latter had raced past him, still reviling hideously, and vanished round the corner in the direction taken by the cab.

On and on tore the vehicle with the inanimate man inside it, and the girl in her scarlet gown on the box, whilst behind it a man in evening dress raced as though a fiend were at his heels.

Well was it for Doris that from her earliest childhood to drive a horse had been as easy to her as to walk or run, and she threaded her way with a dexterity little short of marvellous considering the pace at which she drove.

On and on they flew, unheeding of protesting policemen, unstopped even in the more crowded thoroughfare. On and on through the night, till the man in pursuit, panting, breathless, with beating heart and starting eyes, was perforce obliged to surrender the chase.

"Doin' it for a wager, I suppose?" asked a policeman. "Taint usual to see ladies in evenin' dress drivin' a cab."

"A wager? No, confound her!" panted the luckless Dunbar. "I vowed I would conquer her and she has conquered me."

"Somethin' like a wager, after all," mused the policeman, as he went his way, inwardly thinking that the gentleman speaking to him looked as pretty a villain as he had seen in many a long day.

Somewhere after midnight, Mr. Wright was roused from meditation at his open window by the astounding sight of a cab driven by a lady in evening dress, stopping at the studio door, and his amazement on discovering the identity, both of the driver and occupant of that cab, may be better imagined than described.

Kindly hands speedily carried Maurice indoors. A doctor and two policemen were sent for, and one of the latter was dispatched to Dunbar's house, whilst the other took charge of the empty cab. In the doctor's hands, after a while, Maurice recovered consciousness, but it was many days before he was well enough to give an account of all that had happened to him.

It then transpired that on the very evening he was first missed, as he was leaving his friend's house, a man came up to him, giving him an urgent note from Miss Dunbar, who begged him to come and see her at once on business. He had always been on friendly terms with the lady, though totally unaware of her mad passion for him, and he instantly obeyed the summons.

On arriving at the Dunbars' dwelling, he had, to his great surprise, been shown into a room at the very top of the house, where Miss Dunbar greeted him pleasantly, begged him to be seated, and began to tell him a long, somewhat incoherent story of a picture she wished him to paint.

She then left the room for a moment, and no sooner was she gone than Maurice heard a stealthy step behind him, felt something wet and cold upon his face, and sank into unconsciousness. When he awoke from this, he found himself a prisoner, and totally unable to escape from the hands of Dunbar, who taunted him with being a lunatic kept him as a rule chained to a chair or to a railing in the balcony, and when he became too violent, drugged him heavily.

Maurice said that the wretched man had sworn over and over again that he would keep him in durance vile until Doris consented to be his wife, or until death set the prisoner free.

Dunbar suffered the due penalty of his deeds, and his sister discreetly vanished from polite society; but Maurice and his wife are radiantly happy and prosperous, and no one is more popular than the distinguished artist who, for those short and fateful days of anguish and terror—disappeared.

L. G. Moberly.

"HOW I
CHAPERONED
BELINDA"
COMMENCES
NEXT
WEEK.



Frances Norton:
Adventuress.

THE CONFESSIONS OF CYNTHIA.

Revelations in High Life by a Lady's Companion.

The writer of this series of true stories acted for many years in the capacity of lady's companion to a Society adventuress who lived by robbing her unsuspecting guests. Names have, for obvious reasons, been altered, but the facts are correct.



Cynthia Hamilton:
Her companion.

THE CURTAIN FALLS.

For a moment my cousin made no answer. Then, with a quick breath, she stooped over me, bringing her face close to mine.

"And if I did," she said, "what then? No," as I tried to interrupt. "You shall hear me out before you speak. You know what difficulties I have had to overcome, the plots and schemes I have had to combat to bring about this marriage. You know just what is at stake, what it will mean to me if Kinross should take fright and throw me over. I have let nothing stand in my way, *nothing*! Is it likely that at the last moment I should let Fluffy's jealousy defeat me? I've feared him all along in my heart of hearts, and when I read his threats on board the yacht I was horribly frightened.

But after the first shock I took courage, and when he suddenly appeared in Guernsey I resolved to fight him to the last. I went to meet him this morning determined that, come what might, I would ensure his silence. I would appeal to him, plead with all the force of fascination I could summon. But my words left him untouched; nothing that I could say would move him. He stood there silent, still, listening with a smile on his smooth lips—a smile that maddened me. And at the thought of what this sleek, smooth coward could do, at the thought that he could keep from me all that would make my life worth living, fierce, unreasoning passion gripped me. The world grew dizzy; the sea, the sky were blurred before my eyes, the ground

rocked beneath my feet, a voice louder and louder yet cried within me, saying, 'Kill!' He stood before me close to the brink and the smile never left his face, not even when I threw myself upon him. He was strong, so strong that I dreaded he would escape me. I panted, straining, struggling with every nerve, every muscle of my body. Of a sudden he stumbled, slipped, lost his footing, and—"

She paused. "When next I looked," she said in a hoarse whisper, "he was lying halfway down the shaft on a ledge in the stone. His face, his sneering, smiling face was white and still, and his wide eyes stared unseeing at the sky. And yet, and yet he was not dead. Child"—she caught me by the arm—"why do you look at me like that? Do you think I should be on my knees weeping with joy that he is still alive? He, the man who wishes to ruin me? You can't understand a woman such as I am. For me and those like me there can be no looking back; our only chance is to go on without regret, without remorse, fighting until the last."

"But he," I stammered, heedless of anything but Fluffy's danger, "have you heard how he is?"

"Not yet," she answered.

"Then I must find out," I cried, "now, at once! I will not say a word of what you have told me, Frankie, but I must know how he is. His face, white and still, haunts me. He is alone with nobody to help him, nobody to do him a kindness; and it is you—you that he loved so much—who has done this thing. Don't try to stop me, to hinder me. I will not listen to you. I must go!"

My cousin smiled contemptuously. "Where?" she said. "You forget we are at sea."

I fell back on the pillows with a sob. Whenever I set my will against my cousin, whenever I strove imperfectly and weakly but sincerely to combat her decision, circumstances always seemed against me.

"Don't cry, Cynthia, you won't have long to wait. We shall put into Weymouth by the afternoon. Three hours will see us on shore. Then you can run with all speed both to the post office and the police station. At one you can send a wire inquiring about Fluffy, at the other you can lodge information against me."

My cousin spoke bitterly. Time had been when at her words, her tone, I should have given way, and, anxious only for her, have put all other considerations from me. But now—and for the first time—I put another before Frankie. I loved her always, I was fond of her, proud of her; in my eyes circumstances and not my cousin had always been to blame.

But now with the remembrance of poor Fluffy strong upon me, I could not forgive, could not excuse her.

She read my thoughts, and, kneeling by my side, laid her head next to mine upon the pillow.

"You're going to give me away, Cynthia," she whispered. "I'm a heartless, wicked woman, you think, who doesn't deserve the least consideration. All true, my dear. All true, and yet I haven't been so bad to you. I've loved my little cousin very dearly. If I've been unkind or cross, I never meant it. I—" She paused, her voice shook, there were tears in her eyes. *Tears from Frankie!*

"No, no!" I cried in a passion of grief. "You've never been unkind, and you're not wicked, only—only—" She drew my head on to her shoulder and smoothed my hair.

"I'm not quite the paragon you thought me, eh?" she said; "and you're disappointed. Never mind, dearie, you'll meet a woman after your own heart some day. But you won't love her, and she'll bore you to death! Be patient just a little longer, Cynthia, until I'm married, and then I promise I won't puzzle or perplex you any more—I'll be good, good as gold."

"What do you want me to do?" I asked sadly.

"Nothing very much. Be silent as to Fluffy, that is all. Don't mention his name, if you can help it, and if you're asked any questions, say you don't know anything about him. As for his sufferings, I don't suppose he's much hurt. He's sure to have plenty of money, so you may be sure he'll be treated with all kindness and consideration. You shall wire to the Hotel Poolin directly we get to Weymouth, if it will make your mind easier. But whatever the answer may be promise you will say nothing?"

"Even—" I paused. I could not put into words the awful thought, if he were dead!

Frankie looked at me long and fixedly. "No matter what the answer, you must promise to say nothing. Promise!" Her eyes upon mine, her hands clasping mine, her will strong and implacable, beat down my resistance.

"I promise!" I said, and as the words left my lips a dead weight seemed to settle on my heart.

Frankie kissed me, patted my cheek, and seemed to think the matter ended.

"It's just on twelve," she said. "We're due at Weymouth about three. If you feel well enough I think you'd better try and dress."

"Frankie," I cried, my mind suddenly recalled from Fluffy to myself, "who pulled me out of the water?"

"Need you ask? Do you suppose Chesterton would have allowed anyone to do it but himself? It's the special prerogative of a lover to rescue his lady from a watery grave. You were pretty bad when he fished you out, Cynthia—white as a sheet and quite unconscious. Chesterton's been knocking at your door a hundred times at least in the last half hour. Shall I tell him you're better?"

"Please," I answered.

As a matter of fact I felt horribly bad; the fright and the anxiety had given me a shock from which it was not easy to rally. Somehow or other I dressed myself and got on deck. Chesterton regarded me with much concern. I tried to thank him for his courage, but the words would not come. I was within an ace of breaking down, when Mrs. Venables appeared upon the scene.

"She's not fit to be spoken to," said the kindly little woman, "or even looked at. Come and sit here, Cynthia, by me. Nobody shall disturb you."

She placed me in a comfortable deck-chair, and there, sheltered from the sun by an awning, I closed my eyes and tried to seem at peace—peace that I was so far from feeling. My heart beat, my pulses throbbed, the swish of the waters made me catch my breath in terror. Each wave that we surmounted, each landmark that we passed shortened our journey, shortened the time of my respite, hastened the hour when I should know, must know, the full extent of Frankie's guilt. Perhaps the news would be good, perhaps I should hear he was better? The wash of the waves seemed to echo my words, the swish of the water against the yacht seemed to reply to them. I could almost hear the words, "Dead; he is dead!"

The sunshine glinted on the waters, gleaming like gold; but my eyes were blind, I could only see my cousin and poor Fluffy.

Frankie stood by Lord Kinross, her smile brilliant, her laugh sweet, as calm and as controlled as though the events of the morning had never been. Could she not feel, this beautiful, cold-hearted woman? Did she know no fear, no pity, no remorse? Was she callous or a marvel of self-command, feeling yet hiding all she felt?

The yacht raced home the last few miles, the coast came

nearer and nearer, my anxiety and my apprehension grew to fever height.

I barely waited to be safely set on shore, but started off, trembling, for the post office.

"She's not got over her accident yet, poor child!" I heard my cousin say. "She feels weak and hysterical, and is afraid of breaking down before you all. Leave her to me, Lord Chesterton, she'll be all right directly. I'll take her to a chemist and get a draught. We'll come on after to the hotel—perhaps get there as soon as you."

Frankie linked her arm in mine and guided me through devious streets and thoroughfares until I grew quieter, more composed.

"Will you have some brandy?" she asked me, as we reached the post office. "There's an hotel close by, if you like. No? Well, then we'll come and send the wire. But remember," her fingers closed tightly on my arm—"remember whatever happens, you have promised to keep silence."

"I promised," I said, with dry lips, "and I will keep my word."

I watched my cousin rapidly fill up the form asking for particulars as to Fluffy's condition. She directed it to the manager of the hotel, and signed it "Cynthia Hamilton."

"Now," she said quietly, "there will be just an hour or more to wait. You had better come and have something to eat."

I shook my head. "I can do nothing, nothing till we get the answer." I leant wearily against the desk and listened to the tap-tap of the instrument, spelling out the message. I would wait till the same instrument clicked forth its sentence of life or death.

"You'll faint in a minute," said Frankie anxiously. "Come, like a good girl, and have some dinner; you shall be back in time, I promise you."

But for once I was obstinate. I insisted on remaining. Frankie managed to get a chair for me, and placed it near the door. I watched the people—holiday-makers for the most part—and envied their bright smiles, their happy faces. Frankie stood by me, tall and slim, in a nautical costume of pale blue and cream serge. I counted the buttons on her coat and studied their pattern—an arabesque of pearls and gold—so intently that I could draw one from memory even now. I noticed how white and delicate her skin gleamed against her frock, and the sun shone on her hair tingeing it with gold.

And then from momentary oblivion the click of the telegraph aroused me to sudden and sickening remembrance. It beat into my brain, it kept time with my heart. When—when would the answer come?

At last one of the clerks held up an envelope to Frankie. "Yours, I think," she said, "addressed to 'Cynthia Hamilton.'"

My cousin smiled and took the wire. Her hands never trembled, the colour did not leave her cheeks. Quietly, deliberately she drew out the slip of paper—that thin pink slip that has spelt defeat or victory, sorrow or gladness to how many?

With beating heart I started to my feet, and looking over her shoulder eagerly read. And as I read the tears streamed from my eyes, tears of relief—I was so glad, so thankful!

"Frankie," I cried, and clasped her hand.

She made no answer; she did not, I think, hear me. Her face was white, her mouth was drawn; with eyes wide with fear, dark with terror, she stared before her.

Thus ran the telegram, it was from Fluffy's doctor:

"Patient has recovered consciousness. Sprained ankle, but no serious injury. Doing well."

Doing well! And there were yet three days to pass before my cousin's wedding day.

We arrived at Cromer late that evening. Frankie went straight to her room, and sent word to Lady Fairbairn—Hartland's aunt—that she was too tired to reappear. Kinross went over to the hotel where he and Chesterton were going to put up. I took refuge with my old friend Lady Paula.

Early the next morning Frankie came to my room. She

looked ill, almost haggard; there were dark shadows under her eyes, which were feverishly bright. As she sat there in the grey light of the early morning I realised what yesterday in my joy for Fluffy's safety I had overlooked. If Fluffy were able to travel before Frankie's wedding day that wedding would not take place. As for writing or wiring—I sat up wide awake at the thought.

"Suppose Fluffy wires to Hartland and tells him what has happened," I stammered.

"He will never say what took place at the quarry," said Frankie. "I know him well enough to be sure of that, and of the other things he has to tell Lord Kinross he would not wire."

"But he may send a letter?"

"Yes, I must guard against that. Hartland must not, shall not have a letter from him."

"How can you prevent it, Frankie?"

"Leave that to me, it will not be so very difficult. Fluffy will have his letter addressed here to Kinross, not knowing he is at the hotel. You will help me, Cynthia?"

"Yes," I answered, with a shiver, "I will help you."

"Very well, do as I tell you, and—" She paused, the words familiar to her lips at every crisis of her life, her favourite and defiant phrase, "I shall get through," seemed difficult to speak. She was playing her last game, and the stakes were heavy. For the last time she set her teeth and clenched her hands, for the last time she threw out her challenge bold and defiant, "That which I will—I do."

She was fighting against time; could she hold her own for the matter of two days and the half of a third, she would win a title, an income, a dazzling position, an assured future. Did she lose, she would leave the gaming table of Society, bankrupt of honour, of love, of happiness, of fair repute. Brilliant and beautiful, she would fall from the height of her proud ambitions to the depths of failure, bitter, irretrievable.

"I want you to dress quickly, Cynthia, and go into the garden," she explained. "When you see the postman coming down the drive go and meet him a little distance from the house. If there are any letters for Hartland slip them into your pocket until you can hand them to me. Don't make a mistake, and—" she broke off with a short, sharp sigh, "I can't stand much more of this; I wish it were over one way or the other," she said wearily.

It was yet early when I took up my station in the garden. Lady Fairbain's place was a beautiful house, set in a frame of leafy oaks, the same tall trees skirted the drive on either side.

Lady Paula saw me from her bedroom window and called out a cheery greeting. She found me some few minutes later, and commenced an elaborate description of our bridesmaids' dresses, Clairette's last creation. They had arrived the previous day with various huge chests containing Frankie's trousseau.

I did not pay much attention to her, my thoughts were fixed on the white drive down which the mail must come.

"There's the postman," Lady Paula cried at last. "I'll go and meet him."

She was off before I had time to start. I flew after her, and panting, suggested we should race to meet the man.

"Bet you a pair of gloves I'm there before you," she cried.

"All right," I gasped, and then raced for my very life, leaving Paula far behind.

"Letters—give them me, please, for the Hall." I stretched out my hands, and grasped the pile, and ran them over, hoping to complete my scrutiny before Paula reached me. Letters for Lady Fairbain, Frankie, Paula—but nothing for Lord Kinross.

In triumph I returned upstairs to my cousin.

"Thank goodness, I can take breathing time," she said.

"The next post from Guernsey comes in the evening. Until then I am safe."

The evening mail, cleverly intercepted by my cousin, brought no word from Fluffy, nor was there any letter the following morning, Wednesday, the day before the wedding. That

"HOW I
CHAPERONED
BELINDA."
NEXT WEEK.

afternoon Frankie wired to the doctor at Guernsey for news of Fluffy. She sent a telegram from London, through Clairette, who was used to manipulating her clients' correspondence. There was no chance of a reply till late that evening. Meantime my cousin smiled and talked, and made herself more popular than ever with the men and women staying at the Hall.

Lady Fairbain had invited ever so many people for her nephew's wedding. It was to be a very notable function, and the Hall was

filled to overflowing.

Frankie's presents were magnificent; she had sufficient plate to supply two dinner parties at the same time, and her jewellery was exquisite. Mary Vernon wrote a beautiful letter, accompanied by a pair of diamond earrings. My cousin threw them on the table with a little shudder.

"I wish she hadn't sent them," she muttered. "It's like an omen." Then with a shrug she swept the jewels into her case, and asked me angrily if I could not look a little more cheerful. "Your face literally haunts me, Cynthia. People will think that I ill-treat you."

I made no answer, but avoided my cousin until after dinner, when she sent for me.

"The post's in," she said, "no letter from Guernsey. And—" she paused, "I've heard from Clairette; she wired the doctor's answer on to me. Fluffy's had a relapse, he's delirious. Well," as I stood silent and trembling before her, "have you nothing to say? Is that man's safety more to you than mine? He will get well, sure enough. But not, thank Heaven, till I am married. At last, at last I am safe!" She laughed joyously, clasping her arms above her head she swayed to and fro in a ecstasy of triumph.

That night she was more beautiful, more irresistible than I had seen her. Everybody was enchanted with the fascinating Mrs. Norton. Late in the evening Pettigrew, quite unexpectedly, turned up. He was very smiling, but I thought a little strange.

"I do congratulate you, Mrs. Norton," he remarked. "You've had a hard fight, but you deserve to win, upon my word you do."

Frankie flashed a look of inquiry, his remark called for explanation. He gave none, however, but handed her a string of pearls, his wedding gift.

"Your secretary, will he be here?" asked Frankie, when she had thanked him for his present.

Hiram, however, made no answer, apparently he did not hear.

Everyone sat up late that night, Kinross did not leave till past one in the morning. He drew Frankie out into the garden to say good-bye. I watched them from the porch.

"Good-night, my love," he whispered. "To-morrow—" he stooped and took her in his arms.

She stood and watched him out of sight, a tall figure in the moonlight.

"To-morrow," she said, and caught her breath, "to-morrow!"

The morning dawned fair and fresh, the morning of Frankie's wedding day! I dressed myself early, and went to see if I could help my cousin. The marriage was to take place at two o'clock. Frankie would have liked it earlier, eleven, ten, or nine, if it could have been managed. Lady Fairbain, however, decreed against such unfashionable hours, two was the earliest time she would allow.

By one Frankie was dressed. They said she looked very beautiful in her satin gown, veiled with rich lace and picture hat of plumes, but for myself I do not know. From the earliest dawn my eyes had turned towards the clock, hoping, praying that the hour of her marriage would pass in safety. I could think of nothing else. My fear for Fluffy was lost in sudden apprehension that even now he would contrive to stop my cousin's wedding. And yet, stretched on a bed of sickness, delirious with pain—what could he do?

Again and yet again I told myself there was no cause for fear. And yet, and yet I feared.

When she was dressed Frankie dismissed her maid. Together we watched the hands of the timepiece drawing nearer, and yet nearer to the hour. Her lips were dry, her eyes hard and bright. Her agitation and excitement terrible to see.

Half-past one! Kinross would just be leaving the hotel for the church. In another quarter of an hour Frankie herself would start. And then—

Just as the clock chimed the half hour a maid rushed breathlessly upstairs.

"Lord Kinross, ma'am," she exclaimed, "he says he must see you for a moment."

"I will come," said Frankie quietly. She closed the door, and leant against the mantelpiece, panting for breath.

"My God!" she gasped, "has it come at last." She put her handkerchief to her mouth, her strong, white teeth bit at the lace and tore it. But the next minute she was herself again. Calmly, proudly, she swept downstairs, across the hall into the drawing-room where Hartland waited. She signed to me to follow.

"My darling, I was bound to come to you," were his first words. "I wanted to give you your bouquet myself. *Dearest*," he kissed her passionately—over his shoulder her dark eyes watched the clock.

"You will be late, Hartland; it is ridiculous of you to come here now. Go at once, you should be at the church by this time."

She pushed him from her playfully but firmly. Yet he still lingered, lingered with the boyish disregard of custom and conventionality that occasionally distinguished him.

Laughing, she drew him to the door. For a moment they stood together on the threshold. Then, as he bent to take another, and a last kiss from her lips, there came the sound of wheels, and the sharp gallop of a horse along the drive.

"Some one's in a hurry," said Kinross laughing, "it's a case of haste to the wedding. Who is it, I wonder?"

I knew intuitively who it was. Nearer the wheels came, and nearer, they grew slower, gradually stopped.

"Don't wait," I screamed, "Hartland, don't wait."

Even as I spoke there was a slight commotion in the hall. And then a figure, limping, bandaged, his face white as death, but set in a look of grim determination, passed through the guests and on to where Lord Kinross and my cousin stood.

Frankie gave a sharp cry. All her scheming and her plots, all her intrigues and her selfishness had come to naught. The telegram we had received had been a false one. Fluffy had come himself.

"I have come here, Lord Kinross," he said quietly, "to stop your marriage with Mrs. Norton. Am I in time?"

As he spoke he entered the room; Kinross, dazed and bewildered, followed, with Frankie at his side. And the door shut behind them.

Instantly there was a hubbub of comment. Women discussed the situation with shrill voices and unkind intent, and the men gathered in groups and whispered gloomily. Throughout the stir I crouched against the door, my heart torn with the thought of Frankie. I could hear no word of what was happening, yet I stayed; I did not seem to have the strength to move.

"Come away, Cynthia, come away, little girl," said Pettigrew softly. "I've cleared off the women; look, the hall is quite empty. No one will see or speak to you. Run upstairs, you can do no good. No one can help your cousin—now."

At that my courage came back to me.

"I can help her," I answered, "and I will." I opened the door—the scene rises before me now.

Kinross was sitting in a chair, his head buried in his hands. Facing him stood Fluffy, gazing with cold, calm eyes at the woman who stood between them—a woman whose fierce determination and high spirit cowed before the power in the plain face of the man she had played with, the man she had mocked and derided, the man she called *Fluffy*!

"I can't take it in," said Kinross, raising his head. "I can't understand or comprehend it. Either you lie, or she"—he pointed with an eloquent gesture to my cousin—"she is—Oh, God, it can't be true!"

Fluffy leant forward and touched him on the arm.

"Listen," he said, in his cold and pitiless tone. "Mrs. Norton stole Mary Vernon's diamonds. Partly for the sake of the jewels, partly to prejudice you against Mary in her favour. Proof?" He smiled. "Here," he pointed to my cousin, "look at these pins!" With a deft movement he drew the pins swiftly from her hat. "These are Miss Vernon's earrings differently set. I know it because I arranged the affair. I got the earrings copied in paste, from a photograph, as your cousin, Percival Hope, surmised. A photograph Mrs. Norton stole, as she stole the notes from Hiram Pettigrew's pocket-book, which she placed in her cousin's box. See, here it is, Cynthia herself gave it me," and he drew out the memorable book of silver and green leather. "Proofs? What, have you not heard enough? Look then at this letter, in which Mrs. Norton tells me she has managed to get rid of some of Pettigrew's notes; and this, in which she says she has successfully changed the diamonds; and this, warning me that Hope has traced some of the missing securities. More? Certainly if you wish." He paused.

Kinross, with an attempt, perhaps, to parry the attack, asked in a high-pitched voice, "Why Fluffy told him these things?"

"You're incriminating yourself," he said. "If what you say is true, you are as guilty as the woman you accuse." Kinross drew himself up as he spoke, the dazed look left him, the import of what was happening struck home to him at last.

"Why do I tell you?" answered Fluffy. "To stop you marrying her. Why, again to that?" He paused, a heavy flush stole over his white, pasty-looking skin, and his eyes were brilliant. "She shall not marry you," he said, "nor any other man, because she's mine. *Mine*, I tell you, mine, though she deny me, and defy me to the end. Rather than see her your wife I am ready to proclaim her and myself guilty of theft, of swindling, of—"

Frankie suddenly interrupted.

"Don't listen to him, Hartland. He's mad, mad with jealousy. He does not know what he's saying"—she broke off suddenly.

With a grim smile Fluffy had handed Kinross the pile of letters.

"Don't look at them, dear, don't read them," she pleaded. "They don't count—nothing counts, but that I love you, Hartland!" She sprang to him and put her arms about his neck. But with a gesture of contempt, a look almost of revulsion, he stepped back.

"No," he said hoarsely, "not that."

Then he took up the letters Fluffy had given him, and read them one by one. His face grew cold, and hard, and set, until all trace of softness and of boyishness had gone. When he had finished reading he turned towards my cousin.

"Have you anything to say?" he asked coldly.

With the forlorn hope of softening him, Frankie clung to his arm. He shook her off, not roughly, but with a contempt that stung. She gave a low cry and staggered, then, catching her foot in her long draperies, with a crash she fell, striking her head against the corner of the fender. And as I saw her lying there, her fair head bowed, her pride for ever shattered, as I saw her lying at the feet of the man who, but a little while ago had vowed to love her, to protect her always, something seemed to snap at my heart. I gave a great cry of agony.

The room seemed suddenly full of people. Lady Fairbairn, Paula, and a crowd of women, and at the last Pettigrew, and, yes, Percival Hope!

And then darkness, and the whole world blank.

Some days elapsed before I woke again to life. My first question was of her, but the nurse sighed and shook her head.

"HOW I
CHAPERONED
BELINDA."
NEXT WEEK.

Fluffy, I learnt, had left after a stormy scene. I have never seen nor heard of him since. I asked for Paula, but she and her brother, I was told, had gone from the Hall. Lady Fairbairn did not wish to see me. Pettigrew had also gone. There were left only Lord Chesterton and Percival Hope. Percival wished earnestly to see me, but I felt I could not. He had not been kind to Frankie—my poor Frankie, who had sinned so greatly, who had suffered so sorely.

I dressed myself with difficulty and sent for Chesterton. He was kind and good—how good I can never forget.

"Your cousin's gone away, dear," he said softly. "None of us know where. She was taken to her room, she had hurt her head, you know, and it was thought she was asleep. Late in the evening her room was found to be empty, she had gone, leaving no trace behind."

"No message for me, no note?"

He hesitated.

"She left a letter for me," he commenced softly. "about you. She said what I knew without any telling, that you were good and sweet as a woman could be, and that she left you to my care. So," he put his arm tenderly about my shoulders, "you belong to me now, Cynthia."

I shook my head.

"Not now," I answered, "I can never marry you now."

He tried hard to combat my decision, but at last consented to abide by it, for a time at least.

"I'll leave you alone for a bit, little girl. Then I shall make you change your mind. Meanwhile, I shall send you to stay with my sister."

I did not dispute further, but wished him "good night." He had arranged for me to leave the Hall next day, but late that night when all were sleeping, I stole out of the house. As my cousin had gone, so I went also, friendless and alone, into the world. I had said good-bye for ever to the Smart Set.

My struggles since then I will not enter into—they form no part of these "Confessions." I had a bad time, but at last I have reached some degree of comfort, mainly through the publication of these articles.

I am told that several of those who have read this series, have asked kindly after me, and have wanted to know what I am doing in the present, hope to do in the future.

To these I say that I am waiting for my cousin, waiting for the time—and it will surely come—when she will turn to me. The door of my heart is ever open for her. Though all the world should be against her, my arms should shield her, my hands work for her. I long for her, my beautiful Frankie! I long to take her head upon my shoulder and whisper that I love her, that I sorrow for her. Some day she will come back, some day she will put away from her the evil that has spoilt her life. And then, when like a tired child, she comes home—home to me, may the love I bear her blot out the remembrances of her sufferings and her sorrow and her shame.

Some day she will surely come, and until then I work, and watch and wait.

And if of your kindness you would do me some slight service, I would ask this—Think with regret, if you will, and sorrow, but not with harshness, of the woman I love so dearly, my cousin Frankie.

And so farewell! To the Confessions of Cynthia I needs must write

THE END.

[TO READERS.—If you have enjoyed this series of articles, I am sure that you will like the new series that starts next week. It has been written by a titled lady whose *nom de plume* is Lady Peggy Carstairs, and she tells of the way in which she endeavoured to "marry off" Belinda North (the daughter of an Australian millionaire) to some man with a title. The descriptions of life in high Society circles on the Continent are particularly vivid, and will tell you something you did not know before. May I ask you to buy one extra copy of next week's *SHORT STORIES* and give it to a friend who is likely to become a new reader. If so, I would thank you very much.—Ed. S.S.]

TEN MORE GRAMOPHONES WAITING FOR CLAIMANTS.

HERE is a new competition by which ten more readers of *Short Stories* will each become the possessors of a handsome Gramophone.

The Gramophones are beautifully made instruments, fit to grace any drawing-room, and with every one will be given two records. The gramophone and the records would cost you £2 17s. in any shop. You could not get them for less.

All you have to do is to fix on one of the record discs, and you can hear the song or the instrumental piece as loudly as it was originally sung or played.

You can hear the finest bands in the world play the finest music. ♪ ♪ ♪ ♪ ♪

You can hear the funniest comedians on the music-hall stage singing the funniest songs.

You can hear banjo champions playing solos, and other champions playing on the cornet or flute. ♪ ♪ ♪ ♪ ♪

In fact, there is no limit to the number of songs and instrumental pieces you can hear.

Now that the long winter evenings are upon us, it is difficult to imagine a more enjoyable form of fireside entertainment than to sit in your armchair and listen to the voices of our best singers or to the musical performances of the best orchestras on the Gramophone. And this enjoyment may be yours continually by constructing for us one sentence.

The sentence you have to construct must be composed of words, the initial letters of which, in their proper order, make up the word "CHAPERONED"—a word selected from the title of the new series of articles "How I Chaperoned Belinda."

Here is a sample sentence: "Cynthia, Hartland And Percival Ever Regret Obdurate Norton's Endless Designs" Make up a good sentence and write it down in ink in the spaces provided below, using the initial letters given as the first letters of your words. Then post the coupon on to the Gramophone Editor of *Short Stories*, 17, Henrietta Street, Strand, W.C.

All attempts must reach us by first post, Tuesday, November 4th. A handsome Gramophone will be awarded to each of the ten readers from whom we receive what we consider to be the best sentences.

CUT OUT THE COUPON FROM HERE.

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Name

Address

Each competitor may send in any number of attempts, provided each is written upon a separate coupon.



NANCY BROWN.

A GIRL WITH TWO NAMES.

"I WANT a big bunch of flowers; roses, carnations, lilies, and that sort, with plenty of green stuff."

"Yes, sir; take them, sir?"

"Yes."

In five minutes Raymond Morris, laden with a fragrant burden, was rattling away in a hansom towards 80, Mandeville Street, where his little chum, Kitty Marsden lived.

"How she will love them," he thought, and then his face beamed, as he pictured her happiness at the good news he was bringing. To be retained as counsel in "Buller *versus* Coke," was indeed a piece of luck; he might now safely consider that his feet were firmly set on Ambition's steep ladder, and if it lay in his power they should never slip off. "Dear little Kitty!" Times should brighten for her also. What a hard life they had experienced the previous two years, she perhaps, more than he, for of how poor she had really been Raymond Morris had no conception. "Hard-up" meant to him a chop instead of a decent half crown dinner, but to Kitty it meant a roll and a cup of cocoa, instead of the chop.

They had first met at a second-rate boarding house in Pimlico; she was a clerk, and he, at that time had been qualifying for the Bar, living in the meantime on journalistic work. What made them chum so, he never quite knew; her intensely sympathetic face, voice and manner had appealed to him, and when later, their homes diverged, he taking some unpretentious chambers West, and she a big studio, where she might feel one little corner of the world was her own, they still remained firm chums, and rarely did a Saturday pass without their meeting, or a Sunday, when he did not go to tea, and afterwards smoke his pipe and talk over his big plans with his enthusiastic little hostess.

He often wondered what she got paid, but a sort of delicacy prevented his asking, as though they were the closest of friends, she had never given him the slightest encouragement to help her in any way, and never would, except on the rarest of festivals, allow him to take her out, either to dine or to a play, so in man-like fashion, he concluded she had enough on which to manage comfortably. That thought was to cost him many a pang later on, but he knew nothing of it, as he drove to her, his heart longing for her warm appreciation of his well-deserved success.

"She must come somewhere with me to-night," he muttered, "she has been looking very pale and tired lately, not a bit like her old merry self; she never laughs now, and Kitty's merry laughter is the best tonic in the world, why, it must be ten days since I've seen her, ah! here we are."

"Miss Marsden in?"

"Miss Marsden, sir, she's gone!" said the slavey, with a sad smile, for she saw Miss Marsden's sweetheart (as they had all christened him), was going to, as she put it later, "take on awful."

"Gone? Gone out, my good girl, I suppose, well, I will wait for her."

"No, sir; she's gone away. She sold all her things 'cos missus said she lost her place and couldn't live here any longer."

"Sold her things!" What in the dickens did the stupid girl mean?—Just then the landlady appeared and handed him a note.

"Miss Marsden asked me to give this to you, sir, when you

called. You see, sir, it were this way. A month ago, she lost her place, and, poor thing, she tried hard but she couldn't get another, and so she comes to me, and says as how she were a-going to try her luck elsewhere, and would I buy her things, which I did, though sorry enough I were to do it, for I liked her, sir; she wor the quietest, nicest lodger I'll ever have. You see, sir, it had been a bad time of year, August, and though I told her, she wor quite welcome to stay and the rent could go on until it wor convenient, she wouldn't, she wor that independent; but, come in, sir, a minute, and rest and read your letter, for you look mortal bad."

Morris stepped into the dark hall, and depositing the flowers, sat down and read the note.

"DEAR BIG CHUM.—Your little pal has had the mouldiest luck possible this last month. Hurst sold the business and the new man brought a daughter to do the books, so I was not wanted, and I haven't been able to get anything else. I've tried till I'm pretty nearly desperate, but you know I can't type nor write shorthand, and so I've just come to the end of my resources, and for the present, dear, big, man, our trails are going to divide; maybe they'll meet again, if not, your little pal will always thank you for the two happiest years she has ever had. If I get on, I'll write you, but I can't be under the stream and you afloat in a gay steamer, so it's best to say 'good-bye,' just for the present.

"Don't worry about me, dear chum. I won't forget our motto, 'Here's to a brave to-morrow, that's born from a brave to-day.'"

"Dear big comrade, your little pal wishes you all the good luck obtainable."

Raymond at first felt very savage with Kitty. Why, in the name of all the gods, couldn't she have told him her troubles?

He had poured out enough of his to her, but it was just like a woman, they never had any sense. And now how could he find her? Where and what was she doing in this vast Babylon? And then he grew remorseful, as he remembered his last visit. It had been wet and cold, and he had made up a big fire and they had had a jolly tea, poor little girl, he had helped to consume the very little she had—no wonder she had looked ill and worn and seemed quiet. He could have struck himself in his anger.

He left the flowers with the landlady, and slowly retraced his steps, all the pleasure and excitement gone, but, he would find her, and scold her well for being such a stupid little girl with no real conception of the word "Comrade."

Two years later in his comfortable bachelor quarters Raymond Morris sat smoking his after dinner pipe with his firm friend Dr. Bruton. Already he was becoming known as the "rising barrister," but somehow all his successes failed to give him the joy he had fancied they would.

"Morris, why don't you marry?"

"Suppose, I've not met my other half—my—what do you call it—Affinity, old man."

"Have you never cared for anyone?"

"Not in the way you mean." "I once had the dearest little girl as a pal, but—well, I lost her—and I've never found her. Somehow I don't fancy I'll ever marry."

"Don't you think Madge and I are a good enough example?"

"Yes. Your wife is perfect. By the way, how's the little one, quite strong now?"

"Joyce? Yes, she and her governess, Nancy Brown—pretty name that—have come back looking like two rosy

apples, it does my heart good to hear them laugh. That's the result of letting them run wild at Hayling Island for four months. They were a sorry looking pair when I sent them off.

"What was the matter with Miss—Nancy Brown?"

"Insufficient food, fresh air, and everything else. Trying to live—no, not live—exist respectably on about ten shillings a week. Heaps of girls are trying the same game, poor creatures. The result in her case was general weakness, debility—bad cold, acute attack of pleurisy—and then—thorough collapse. Young Staines—you know him, brought her to the hospital one night; she was coughing and the exertion made her faint. The conductor of the 'bus in which they were, called a policeman, and then Staines volunteered to bring her to us, and there she stayed. The wife heard all about her from me, and when we were at our wits' end to know what to do with her, for the poor thing had no friends, she proposed sending her away with Joyce, and well, you should see her now. Staines would hardly believe she was the same girl. But you'll see her to-morrow, you're dining with us?"

"Yes. But had she no relations—Miss Nancy Brown?"

"She has depended for days, and raved about Nancy Brown and her work, and for a long time she was too ill to be questioned. We just asked if that was her name and she nodded, and eventually we found out she had no one belonging to her, and was just earning bread and butter by addressing envelopes."

"Poor thing!"

"Well, good night, old chap, I must be off."

Left to himself Raymond Morris began to think, and his thoughts were not pleasant. He reviewed that weary search for Kitty; perhaps she, too, was like this Nancy Brown, oh! why had she not trusted him?

"Please ma'am, what can we do? Prior's just fallen upstairs and twisted her ankle awful, and can't move, and there's master and his friend coming in for dinner in an hour."

"Can't move! Poor thing! What have you done for her, cook?" asked pretty little Mrs. Bruton, her face puckered as she tried to think how they could manage, and she had wanted the dinner to be especially nice for Raymond Morris.

"She's gone to bed, ma'am, perhaps when the doctor comes in, he'll have a look at her, but what can we do, who's to lay the table and bring up the things?" wailed the cook in a most dismal voice.

"Why I will, cook, if you won't look quite so tragic," and Nancy Brown danced into the room with the pet of the house—three-year-old Joyce, in her arms. "Don't worry, dear Mrs. Bruton, Prior is more frightened than hurt, she's going to lend me a cap and apron and I'll make the smartest parlour-maid in the world."

"Nancy! You—"

"Yes, why not? Why, dear Mrs. Bruton, think what you've done for me, please do let me help you out of this little difficulty," pleaded Nancy.

"But, my dear, I wanted you to look your prettiest for our friend, and now—"

"I don't think Mr. Raymond Morris will mind," replied Nancy, in rather a cold tone. "A rich, successful barrister isn't likely to take much notice of a nursery governess."

"Don't be silly, child. You don't know him or you would not talk like that. Well, dear, I suppose I must let you, but I shall tell them all about it, and you will come in after, won't you?"

"Perhaps."

In ten minutes Nancy was dressed, the pretty head was crowned with one of Prior's coquettish caps, and her fingers soon had the table laid, even to Mrs. Bruton's requirements.

"I wonder if he—oh! no, he won't—I expect he's quite forgotten"—and resolutely banishing a tear, Nancy ran off to help cook dish up.

As the soup was being handed to him Morris endeavoured to get a look at Miss Nancy Brown, whom his hostess had told him had come to the rescue so nobly, and the face appeared strangely familiar, but it was not until the gentle voice said

demurely, "Sherry, sir?" that he traced the absurd likeness to Kitty. *Nancy Brown was Kitty!* why, he must be dreaming, and he pulled himself together and talked to his hostess, though not one movement of the amateur parlourmaid escaped his keen eyes. It was—it was Kitty. But why call herself Nancy Brown?

"Are you sure that girl's name is Nancy Brown?" he asked his friend, when later Mrs. Bruton had left them and gone to Joyce.

"Why, yes. She says so. Do you think you have discovered some famous criminal in her?" laughed the doctor.

"No, but wait till your wife joins us and then I'll tell you what I do think."

In the doctor's cosy sanctum Morris told his story, and of his fruitless attempts to find Kitty. "And often and often, Mrs. Bruton, that last month, I don't believe she had enough to eat. I remember one night calling to see her, and grumbling like a selfish idiot, because I had not had time to have a regular dinner, and her quiet remark, 'Did you have no lunch, big man?' And when I said 'Oh, yes,' she replied gently, 'Then, I don't think you will hurt, but you shall have a cup of cocoa directly.'"

"She has refused to come down, but suppose you go to her, she is in the nursery, the second door to the left, and see if you can persuade her, and try to find out if she is Kitty," said Mrs. Bruton.

He thanked her and went.

"May I come in?"

Nancy looked very startled and grew extremely red, as she answered:

"What can I do for you, sir?"

"You can tell me, if you have a sister or any near relation named Kitty Marsden?"

"I had—once—why—why do you want to know?" and she faced him bravely.

"Because the one object of my life is to find her. I have been looking for her now for two years, and I've almost lost heart."

"Why do you want to see her so much?"

"Ah! that I must tell to her. Won't you give me her address—Miss Nancy Brown?"

"I—I cannot—she died—long ago," but as she uttered these words her face crimsoned, and she bent to the fire to hide her confusion.

"Pardon my flatly contradicting you, but"—bending towards her, Morris endeavoured to take her hand, "tell me, why is my little pal masquerading as Nancy Brown?"

"Don't, please don't," and, wrenching her hand away, the girl sank on the floor by Joyce's cot and Raymond saw the little form was shaken with tremulous sobbing.

Kneeling down by her, he endeavoured to take her in his arms. "Little girl, big man's little chum, don't cry, see, your comrade won't bother you any more, you shall be a dozen Nancy Browns if you like. See, was it this, you ran away from me because you were not getting on, and things got worse, and you couldn't trust big man, and so you were afraid he would find you, and you—silly child, you thought he might pity you, so you changed your name and that was why he could never trace his dear little chum—Kitty."

There was no answer, but he fancied the sobs were less.

"Sweet one, don't you see big man is crying too. Won't Kitty look up and smile at her comrade, she's hurting him awful."

At this Nancy, or rather, Kitty, raised her head, but her eyes fell again as they encountered Morris' ardent gaze.

"Don't you understand, little one, though things have gone so smoothly and well with big comrade, he's not enjoyed anything through the loss of his little pal. He has missed her tender sympathy so, and he wants her to come and share his good luck and look after him for—ever, will she?" and he gently stroked the little face. "We must go down and tell them that I am contemplating bigamy."

"Bigamy?"

"Yes, sweet one, don't you see, I'm going to marry Kitty Marsden and Nancy Brown."

Robert Murray.



Never Contracted Any.

GLADYS: "I hope, dearest, that you will never contract any debts."

Jack: "Never." Gladys: "Jack,

are you sure?" Jack: "Positive. I always expand my debts."

A Dear Girl.

"SHE is such a dear girl, and she loves flowers devotedly." "Yes," responded his unsympathetic listener, "most girls who love flowers devotedly are dear girls."

A Timely Warning.

FORTUNE-TELLER (to gaily-dressed girl): "Your husband will be a poor man—unless—" Maiden (cagerly): "Unless what?" "You dress more economically after marriage than you do now."

Excusable Sometimes.

HELEN HYLER: "Don't you think it is very bad form for a man who is calling on a young lady to sit down before she does?" Jack Lever: "Certainly; but under some circumstances he has to."

Unsentimental.

MR. POETICUS (entering cheerfully): "My love is like the red, red rose!" Mrs. Poeticus (looking up from the stove: "You'd look red, too, you lazy scribbler, if you'd been bending over a frying-pan for twenty minutes."

Poor Father.

CUSTOMER: "Some children's shoes, please." Dealer: "Yes, sir. Now there is an excellent make of shoe. How old is the child?" Customer (with a sigh): "Child! I have nine of them. Show me the wholesale department."

Only One of Many.

MAID: "Gentleman wishes to see you, mum. Here's his card." Miss Flirtie: "Um—I don't remember that name." "He said, mum, that you was to see him, or else give him something of his you had." "It must be someone I met at the seaside in the summer. Take that box of rings, and tell him to pick out his."

The Bridegroom Objected.

A WORKING man was being united to the lady of his choice at a certain church, and just before the moment for the production of the ring, the officiating clergyman leant toward the bride, and whispered: "Please take off your glove." To his intense dismay, the bridegroom resented the action, and cried: "Here, mister, no whispering to my gal."

What She Really Wanted.

JUDGE (to prosecuting witness): "Have you any real cause of complaint against your husband?" Wife: "Yes, sir. He refuses to buy me a new bonnet, and I haven't had a new silk dress for two years." Judge: "But I thought he came home tipsy and beat you over the head with a chair." Wife: "Well, he did; but I wouldn't count that if I could get the dress and bonnet."

Method in her Madness.

SWEET GIRL: "Papa, I wish you'd lock up your money and pretend to fail; there's a good old dear. It needn't last more than a week or two, and there are so many failures now no one will find fault." Father: "Of all things! Wha—" Sweet Girl: "Oh, it's all right. You see, I'm engaged to nine young men, and I've got to get rid of at least eight of them, somehow."

Made him an Example.

BRIGGS: "Does your wife object to you smoking cigarettes in the house?" Braggs: "No. She uses me as a horrible example to our boy."

A Cheap Threat.

OFFICER (to young lady at the ball): "If you do not reciprocate my love, I shall throw myself out of the window this very day." Lady: "You live on the ground floor, I presume?"

Two's Company.

CLARA: "My friend, Mr. Spooner, who caught a glimpse of you yesterday, said he would give anything to kiss you. Shall I bring him round to-night?" Maud: "No; send him round."

Distantly Related.

LIVINGSTON: "I didn't know that you and Miss Feather-spray were so well acquainted." Nina: "Oh, yes; we are distantly related." Livingston: "How?" Nina: "We have both promised to be sisters to the same young man."

Wouldn't Look Well.

YOUNG LADY: "How much?" Telegraph Clerk: "Sixpence, miss." Young Lady: "What, for that one word, 'Yes'?" Telegraph Clerk: "You can repeat it half a dozen times for the same money if you like." Young Lady: "No, that wouldn't look well. It's an answer to a proposal of marriage."

Had his Reasons.

SCENE.—House of a recently-married pair. Loving Husband: "What are you smiling at, dear?" Sarcastic Wife: "I was recalling how you used to sit and hold my hand for an hour at a time before we were married. How silly you were." Loving Husband: "I wasn't silly at all. I held your hand to keep you away from the piano."

Wild Times.

"You make me think," John Williams said, dropping upon the sofa beside a pretty girl, "of a bank whereon the wild thyme grows." "Do I?" she murmured; "it's so nice; but that is pa's step in the hall, and unless you can drop out of the front window before I cease speaking, you'll have a wild time with him, my own, for he loves you not." He drops.

Willing to Oblige.

OLD BRAMBLE: "Want to marry my daughter, do you? Let me say, sir, that you are not exactly the sort of man I would like for a son-in-law." Young Gentleman: "Well, you are not the sort of man I would like for a father-in-law; but then, you know, we needn't be chummy unless we want to."

What he Wanted.

The young man's face was flushed, and his manner was strangely agitated. "Miss Blanche," he said, "I hesitated about coming to you, but my feelings have overpowered me at last. Will it be too much for me to ask—" "Pray go on," said the maiden, with heart wildly beating, as his voice faltered. Yes, they were coming, the words that she and her dear mamma had so long waited for. "I came to ask you, Miss Blanche—" "Yes," she smiled encouragingly. "If it would be too much trouble for you to write down that recipe which you said you had for warding off indigestion. Doctors always charge so for a prescription."

He Acknowledged the Softness.

"You mustn't touch the top of the baby's head," said a mother to her four-year-old; "she has a soft spot there that is very tender." The youngster gazed at it curiously for a moment, and then asked: "Do all babies have soft spots on their heads?" "Yes." "Did papa have a soft spot on the top of his head when he was a baby?" "Yes," replied the mother, with a sigh, "and he has got it yet." And the old man, who had heard the conversation from an adjoining room, said: "Yes, indeed he has, my dear boy, or he would be a single man to-day."



The Miss and the Mile.

A First of April Tragedy.

SEPTIMUS SMITH was a man who lived in a world of his own. He was one of the best-hearted fellows breathing, but somehow he could not get the girls of his acquaintance to acknowledge this fact. He absolutely yearned for domestic felicity, but at thirty-eight he was still a bachelor, still in vain pursuit of the princess of his dreams.

Now, it was perfectly clear that the one thing above all others which stood in the way of his settlement in life, was his painful shyness—shyness which always seemed to afflict him most when, as had happened some dozen times or more, he had screwed his courage up to the particular point of interviewing the current lady of his choice, with a view to a proposal.

As a matter of fact, it never came to that; the proposal never, by any chance, got farther than the intention; the three blondes, two brunettes, and seven other young ladies who were a little of each, being left in that unsatisfactory state of ignorance which is *not* bliss. He had an exasperating way of veiling his meaning, so that even the Sphinx would have been puzzled to solve the riddle.

Still, in spite of all this, he had a certain sort of attraction for ladies generally. He was rich, fairly personable, and—which was a great point in his favour—he was of a romantic turn of mind.

Now, romance is all very well, but it doesn't appeal to everybody; and, therefore, while women of the younger sort admired Septimus Smith for the imagination that was in him, his own sex, to a man, wrote him down as being something very much like an ass.

For some months prior to the date of this chronicle, he had been an object of solicitude to one of his lady friends. Delia Spence did not deceive herself into the belief that she loved the bashful Septimus, being so far candid as to acknowledge to herself that a picturesque and up-to-date Kensington flat, together with plenty of money to keep it up—and a little over—were the things most to be desired in connection with her dilatory suitor's anticipated declaration.

Every reasonable opportunity was given Mr. Smith when he paid a visit to—as Delia's terrible young brother called it—"come up to the scratch," but surely no bird was ever so difficult to approach with the salt-box. Times out of number, Mrs. Spence, with all a mother's anxiety for her daughter's matrimonial future, found something to do elsewhere, so that the consequent *tête-à-tête* might have every chance.

Delia's younger sister Connie, also, was not a whit less considerate than her mother, and invariably vanished at the sound of Septimus Smith's hesitating knock and ring.

But it was all thrown away, and poor Septimus, much as he desired to declare himself, never succeeded in getting to the—"Will you be mine?"

Then he came to a resolution.

It was the last day of March, and he felt that, for him, there was only one way to take the plunge.

"It's no use," he said to himself; "if I wait 'till doomsday' I'll never be able to do it. Somehow the words seem to freeze on my lips just when I am going to speak. I'll write

to her! That's what I'll do. It will be easier for me; and have precisely the same effect."

There was no hesitation now. A coward in the presence of beauty, Septimus Smith was a veritable hero on paper. The letter was a triumph of the epistolary art, the writer's hand and heart being offered for his lady-love's acceptance in terms at once splendid and convincing.

With the fateful missive in his pocket, he set out for Chiswick, in the spirit of

the man who has greatly dared, and conscientiously looks for his reward.

But the fair Delia had also, herself, on that same last day of March, come to a resolution. She was what people style "getting on"—being sensible, she knew it—and felt that if much more time were "wasted," she stood a very good—or bad—chance of attaining to the "shelf."

She was determined if Septimus Smith really meant anything, he should be made to say it, or give place to another and a better man, in the person of Lieut. Treen, R.N., who, though not so well-off as Septimus, was younger and better looking.

To give her hesitant swain no shadow of an excuse for longer delaying his declaration, Delia had concocted a scheme which certainly did credit to her ingenuity.

Procuring, through a friend, tickets for a Kubelik recital at St. James's Hall for that evening, she had asked the gallant lieutenant, to his great delight, to escort Connie and herself.

At the last moment a toothache or a headache compelled her, she said, to remain at home, but that Mrs. Spence could take her place.

It was astonishing how rapid was her recovery, for when, ten minutes after the departure of the concert party, Septimus Smith's knock sounded at the door, the "ache" had vanished, and Delia was warbling "In Old Madrid."

"Mamma and Connie have gone to hear Kubelik," she said, by way of first shot. "I expect they'll be late."

They talked in whispers, and sat with their chairs very close to each other, but Septimus Smith only uttered a string of unmeaning generalities; he did not so much as attempt to pop the question.

All in vain were Delia's modest efforts to elicit the words which would make her prospective mistress of the Kensington flat, and the comfortable income.

Had she but known that the housemaid who had opened the door to Septimus had in her possession, for deposit in Delia's room, that hero's written proposal of marriage, she might, perhaps, have acted differently.

Vexed beyond bounds, she saw her visitor depart, with almost savage satisfaction—if such a state of mind can be imputed to a lady.

"I'll write to Arthur Treen to-morrow, and if he asks me to marry him, which I know he will, I'll accept him, just to show Mr. Septimus Smith what I think of his contemptible conduct."

Of course she cried, women mostly do in such circumstances, and went to bed in the dark. Thus she never saw Septimus Smith's letter, which the housemaid had laid in the top of her dressing-case, and which was there still when the first of April dawned.

The Spences were great people for practical jokes, especially those of the "April fool" order. On the first of the month, therefore, everybody in the house kept well on the alert, to circumvent any attempt upon his or her credulity.

Connie Spence was a perfect little demon in this particular, and it was owing only to the absorbing nature of Delia's

affair that she had failed on this occasion to prepare something specially "fool-making."

The two sisters slept together, and it so happened that on the morning of the historic "first" Connie awoke before Delia.

There was sufficient light to enable her to see her sister's dressing-case. It was open, and on the top of its contents lay—a letter.

"It's a trick," she at once said to herself, "but they won't catch me!"

Creeping softly towards it, she saw that it was addressed to "Miss Delia Spence."

"Poor as poor!" she went on. "Delia will easily see through it, unless she forgets what the day is."

Then she was seized with an inspiration.

Hurriedly dressing herself, she sought out the housemaid, who regarded the note in her hand with anything but satisfaction.

"Jane," she said, "bring this letter upstairs, and tell Delia that Mr. Smith brought it this morning."

"Now to see the fun," she laughed, as she tripped back to her sister's room.

Delia was awake, and was on her guard.

"She won't fool me, if I know it," she said to herself.

"Mr. Smith asked me to give you this, miss."

It was Jane, the housemaid.

"Jane, I'm surprised at you! Miss Connie gave it to you."

"Miss Delia, as sure as I'm standing here, Mr. Smith gave it to me for you last night."

"Last night?" cried Connie, winking her eye at Jane, as a sign that she had forgotten her lesson.

"No, this morning, I mean."

There was nothing for it. Delia demanded the letter, which she proceeded to tear into half-a-dozen pieces, and threw on to the floor.

Lieut. Arthur Treen soon responded to Delia's invitation, and bore her off to the Winter Exhibition at Prince's Hall.

Then it was that Connie confessed to her mother, who, interviewing Jane the housemaid, elicited the fact that Mr. Smith had undoubtedly given her the letter the night before to place in Miss Delia's room.

Mrs. Spence now suspected that a miss had been made, which, for anything that could be done to rectify it, might just as well have been a mile.

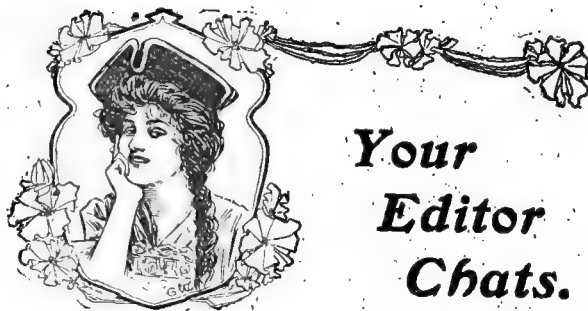
The dust-bin was turned out, and after a lot of searching and soiling of hands, the half-dozen pieces of paper were rescued, joined together—and revealed Mr. Septimus Smith's proposal of marriage.

Delia was furious, when she was told on her return. Through being too clever she had really been made an April fool of.

To think that, after all, the tardy Septimus had proposed, and—too late. Yes, too late, for, instead of inspecting the pictures, she had had, in accepting Lieut. Treen, quite enough to occupy her while at Prince's Hall.

There is every reason to believe that Septimus Smith has not only never ventured upon another proposal, but has eschewed the society of the fair sex altogether.

E. Ralph.



Your Editor Chats.

"Buy two copies of next week's 'Short Stories' and give one to a friend."

This suggestion I sincerely trust you will be kind enough to follow. It is one which, if carried out by you personally, will benefit your favourite little story paper in such a way as to justify the expense to which it has been put to secure the remarkable series of articles by Lady Peggy Carstairs which will start in next Tuesday's issue.

If you have enjoyed "THE CONFESSIONS OF CYNTHIA" (as I hope you have), then you will certainly enjoy "HOW I CHAPERONED BELINDA"; and you will be doing your little favourite a good turn (as well as doing your friend a good turn) if you just for once spend an extra penny in getting an extra copy of next week's *Short Stories* and handing it to someone who is not at present a reader.

OUR GRAMOPHONES.

The result of the first Gramophone Competition will appear next week. I had hoped to publish it in this issue, but the attempts have been so numerous that it has been impossible for our large checking staff to get through the work in time. Meanwhile, there are other competitions going on every week, and it would be well for you to have a try for one of these splendid instruments. There is no reason why you should not go in for every one of the competitions, is there?

OUR NEW SERIAL.

I shall be very pleased indeed if readers would send me a line to tell me what they think of "A FOE IN THE FAMILY." Personally, I think it is one of the brightest and most entrancing stories that we have had in *Short Stories* for a long time. It will not, take you long to scribble down on the back of a post-card your candid opinion of it, and the little trouble you take will be greatly appreciated by

A MARRIED lady, who is in the habit of spending most of her time in the society of her neighbours, happened to be taken ill, and sent her husband in great haste for a physician. The husband ran a short distance and then returned, exclaiming: "My dear, where shall I find you when I come back?"

"Is your papa in, Mary?" "Yes, but you may come in." "I don't think he likes me, and he might—" "There is no need of being afraid; he is engaged." "Engaged, is he?" "Yes; he stayed out till after twelve last night, and went off this morning without giving me a chance to talk to him. She is talking to him now, and he won't be in this part the house for the next three hours. Come in."



Substance and Shadow;

or, LOVE THE HELPER.

ask to have a confidential talk with me, and now you tell me that he would like to see me!"

Edith Fulton blushed deeply. It seemed to her that he must be very keen-sighted to have detected "how the wind blew," as he phrased it; she had not learnt that lovers usually betray the state of their feelings to other people.

"Yes, grandad," she responded, laying her head against his capacious waistcoat to hide the blushes. "Rob and I are very fond of each other. He never said a word to me till the day when he saved me from being hurt when my pony ran away, but he always longed for the opportunity to say something. You see, he is not so well off as I—that is, as we are, and when he saw the others always waiting on me, he felt that he hadn't a chance against them."

"And you?" queried her grandfather, patting the head of his son's child. "What of yourself?"

"I saw him frequently as I went about, but I never spoke to him; although I was attracted by his straightforward, manly look!" said Edie, speaking more boldly, now that she felt called upon to give an explanation of the fact that she had fallen in love with one whose station in life was not equal to her own. "But after his gallant deed in saving me from serious injury, wounding his arm severely in the act, I began to love him, and now I consider him superior to any! He is coming to see you, to know—"

Edie paused; she was in some doubt whether her grandfather would look with favour on the young suitor or not.

"Oh, I'll see him!" said old Mr. Fulton. "If you love him, Edie, then he has my consent. I am concerned only for your happiness, and I would do nothing to mar it! Perhaps I have appeared harsh occasionally, but my actions have been dictated by a knowledge of life and it was all for your good!"

"I know it! I am sure of it!" cried Edie warmly, jumping up and kissing him affectionately. "Oh, we shall be so happy, Rob and I!"

Rob Miller came and was cordially received by old Mr. Fulton. Rob was an orphan and was working on a neighbouring farm. It seemed like impudence for him to aspire to the hand of Edith Fulton, but he was a manly young fellow, with every promise of becoming a good farmer. He was possessed of just enough ambition, in the opinion of Fulton, to make him get on in that calling, and that was sufficient to qualify him for candidature as Edie's husband.

The old man was very fond of his granddaughter, the only relation he had in the world, and he was ready to make any sacrifice for her; but he was not foolish and had enough determination to make him put his foot down firmly when occasion required.

The engagement was announced and the wedding day was fixed within a short time after the engagement was made

known. Rob and Edie grew more fond of each other, if that were possible, and grandfather beamed with contentment while disappointed suitors made unkind remarks behind Edie's back. The question of ways and means for the future bride and bridegroom was settled by Mr. Fulton. Everyone expected that Edie would be provided for by the old gentleman, and their surmises proved well founded.

"Now, young people," he cried with a benovolent smile, "I have a wedding present for you. Here, Edie, is a deed of gift in connection with The Elms, the next farm to this, which I have had cultivated by a steward for the last three years in anticipation of something of this sort. That's why I didn't let it. It will belong to you and your husband as long as you live in it and cultivate it; if you leave it to live elsewhere, it will revert to me. And here, Rob, is a cheque for £250, which will come useful in setting up housekeeping and the remainder will serve as a nest egg; you will find a little money handy till you get your harvest in and also afterwards!"

Edie and Rob were loud in their expressions of gratitude and nearly overwhelmed the old man, who gazed at them with tear-moistened eyes and a look that seemed to ask: "Will you always be so grateful?"

The wedding was a grand affair for the village and the happy pair went off for a short honeymoon at a southern seaside resort; then they settled down to married life on The Elms farm.

It was the end of October when they actually took possession, and the labour on the land was practically beginning for the year. Rob and Edie were quite happy and contented, and full of high hopes. Old Fulton looked in now and then to see them and went over the land with his new grandson, but he said nothing; Rob was full of assurance and the old man admitted to himself that he had said he would let them manage their own affairs. On the whole, the farm was doing well and, although there were one or two points on which he was not entirely satisfied, it was not fair to complain.

Rob and Edie developed grander ideas as the months wore on; they were in good circumstances, they thought, and they ought to do as others did. The money given to them by Fulton had been considerably decreased, but the harvest would come in due time and all would be well!

They took advantage of various inducements by railway companies to take short trips to London and to cities nearer to The Elms, and just before the hay crop was due they spent a fortnight in the Metropolis. When they returned, Rob found that the hay had suffered; he had left his cutting a few days too long, taking advantage of the fine weather to prolong his stay in London, with the result that a rainy time set in immediately on his return and the value of his hay crop was reduced to a very low figure. The wheat harvest, too, proved bad; insufficient attention during the last four months had had the usual result, and Michaelmas saw Rob and Edie with lengthened faces and a sentiment of unrest and dissatisfaction in their hearts.

When Mr. Fulton came over next time, they were full of their trouble and Rob complained of the disappointing character of the soil.

"The land is bad; it's very poor," said Rob in a vexed tone. "After all the time and labour and money spent on it, the return is ruinous."

Old Fulton's eyes glittered at this implied reproach of his conduct in saddling such bad land on them.

"The land is all right, my boy!" he answered grimly.

"There has been too much time, labour and money spent on holidays; had that been put on the land, your harvest would have been as good as other people's!"

"Oh, grandfather!" exclaimed Edie reproachfully.

"I have done my best!" Rob cried, when Fulton had left them. "Edie, I am tired of farming! I never really liked it," he added, "for I believe it is not my true calling. I never had a chance of seeking my proper vocation in life. I wish—"

"What, Rob?" she asked as he stopped.

"I wish I could give up this place and go to London, Edie! I believe I am fitted for something better than the drudgery of ploughing! I'm sure I could do better."

"Yes, Rob! Let us go to London and get out of this!" cried Edie.

And so it was arranged.

For a little while longer they thought it over, and then old Fulton was informed of their intention.

"Very good!" he remarked quietly. "You must please yourselves. I hope that you will find your proper vocation. The Elms reverts to me, as you know."

They did know and they were prepared to hear him say it, although they had secretly hoped that he would allow them to let it and take the rent. They had to wait a few weeks longer, owing to the arrival of a daughter, but as soon as they could, they bade farewell to The Elms.

It was a glorious day when they left and, notwithstanding her unflinching devotion to her husband, Edie felt a pang as she took a last look at the old place. Rob saw the expression in her eyes; he himself felt saddened by the parting, but he reassured himself by saying that he would do ever so much better and he tried to drive away his wife's temporary gloom.

"It's not pleasant to say good-bye to anything, Edie. I know," he said lovingly, "but we have the great consolation of knowing that we are going to better things, dear."

Edie turned to him with a bright smile.

"In a little while we shall wonder how we endured it, Rob!" she cried. "Your capabilities were simply being wasted there!"

They took furnished lodgings at first, until they could get a

(Continued on next page.)

Indigestion

SIX MONTHS AGO MY HEALTH BEGAN TO FAIL."

The foregoing statement was made by Mrs. Hake, 61 Lower Barton Hill Road, Bristol, to a *Bristol Times and Mirror* reporter. In continuing her story, she said:—"My appetite which had been excellent, fell off, and after the lightest meal, indigestion afflicted me, and bile began to rise in my throat. I was quite prostrated, and what with acute pains in my head, restless sleep, and severe fainting fits, it can easily be imagined that I became languid and 'fagged out' with the least exertion, and utterly miserable. I consulted a doctor, but my biliousness continued, and seemed to be incurable. Then my husband, seeing an account of a Bile Bean Cure in a case like mine, persuaded me to give them a trial. I commenced taking them, and soon noticed a decided improvement. The sickness became less frequent and severe, and my appetite gradually improved. Eating better, I gradually regained my strength, the headaches departed, and I began to obtain refreshing sleep. I continued taking the Beans, and finally not a trace of my ailments remained, and I am quite cured."



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house and furnish it with the money that remained to them. They had to take a larger house than they needed, as small houses were not easy to get in a good locality, but they decided that they would let two or even three rooms furnished if that should prove necessary.

Rob set about finding a position in real earnest. He had had no exact notion of what he would do, but he was well educated and wrote a good hand, so he concluded that it would be an easy matter for him to obtain a manager's place in a firm dealing in machinery or other agricultural requisites, if the worst came to the worst. His pet idea, however, was to try the stage or the concert hall (for he had been told that he had a good voice and believed it), but he was vaguely conscious that he might not get a chance immediately; in the meantime, however, there were other directions in which he would doubtless be able to make a mark.

The young couple were soon to discover the mistake into which they had fallen. Rob did not find the position suitable to his talent; in fact, his talent did not appear to be recognised by anyone in any direction. Week after week passed; the money was going out, but none came in. They decided to let two rooms and, after nearly a fortnight, they secured lodgers in the persons of a man and wife of small independent means—very nice elderly people who gave excellent references and wanted board as well as lodgings. They paid a month in advance to show their genuineness, for—as the man said—"references are nothing much to go by and money is worth more than anything in these matters."

Before the month was up, Rob obtained a situation as a warehouseman; it was a bitter fall, but he resolutely refused to take it as a defeat and regarded it as a stop-gap only. Edie supported him in this view.

"Everybody has his trials, Rob," she said confidently, "and we have ours, but we must persevere and all is sure to come out well in the end. You will find your vocation in time, and we shall be all the better for the trials; they will draw us together—keep us together, I mean."

She kissed him and they were happy.

Mr. and Mrs. Cornish were the pleasantest persons imaginable; not a bit of "side," although they were clearly in good circumstances. Mr. Cornish smoked a pipe with Rob very often in the evening, and Mrs. Cornish was more like a sister or a mother, to Edie. She was ready "to eat the baby," to use Edie's own words, and the two women became so friendly that they sometimes wore one another's jacket or skirt.

The first month passed. Mr. Cornish did not attempt to continue the advance payments, and Bob and Edie decided, after serious consultation, that it was not fair to ask. The second month passed, and the third was nearly up, but still no payment was forthcoming from the Cornishes.

"We must draw the remainder of our money for the rent and the taxes," said Rob gravely. "Including the gas and the water, I fancy we owe about thirty pounds and that is really more than we have got left in the savings bank. I think we might ask them for a little money now, Edie: it's best part of two months they owe, and it runs into a good deal to keep them."

"There was a note from the doctor this morning," said Edie, just as gravely. "He would like his account settled. We have had him here quite a lot for baby and me; I suppose it is the change from the country to the town, for we have not been well, either of us, since we came into stuffy London. But we shall get used to it!" she continued hastily. "And when you succeed, we shall be able to live out a little way."

"The little girl does not get used to it," rejoined Rob anxiously. "She is worse, Edie, than she was at first. She always seems to be ailing now!"

Edie was silent and cast an anxious look at the cradle. It was true; she hardly liked to admit it to herself, but she wished above all things not to discourage her husband. Yet she could not deny the truth of his remark.

The little stock of money was deposited in a savings bank that paid on demand, so the gold was brought home by Rob on the following evening.

"I have asked Mrs. Cornish to let us have something on account," said Edie, "and she has promised that Mr. Cornish shall give me a cheque to-morrow for the two months—perhaps for three. I explained that our expenses were heavy, and she seemed so sorry that they had been so neglectful. I told her just how things stood, so far as money matters were concerned. What a nice woman she is!"

They would have gone to bed perfectly happy had it not been for the baby; little Daisy was not nearly so well and the medical man had to be called in again.

On the following morning Rob went off to work with a heavy heart, for the little one was much worse. Edie called in the assistance of Mrs. Cornish, who helped the young mother to attend to Daisy.

"I should call in the doctor," advised Mrs. Cornish, meditatively.

"He promised to come when on his rounds," responded Edie, striving to speak calmly.

"I would not wait till then, my dear," counselled Mrs. Cornish. "Go now. I will look after the little one and you won't be long."

Edie accepted the advice and went in search of the medical gentleman who kindly informed her that he would be there almost as soon as she was. On Edie's return, Mrs. Cornish decided to go upstairs and make some improvement in her toilette, so that she might be presentable when the doctor arrived.

Dr. Matthews reassured the distracted mother to a slight extent; he stayed quite a long time, and left with the assertion that the child, although very ill, was not in the immediate danger imagined by its mother and Mrs. Cornish.

"She wants light nourishment," he decided. "Can you get the special preparation I recommended yesterday?"

Edie said that it should be obtained at once and, when the doctor had gone, she called to Mrs. Cornish.

No reply. It was strange that the lodger had not reappeared. Edie ran upstairs and knocked at the door. Not receiving any answer, she ventured to open it, and she started back, in surprise. The room was in disorder and it was clear that many things had been taken out of it.

With an unknown fear oppressing her, Edie went to the other room, and a similar scene of disorder met her eyes. Then the truth appeared to stare her in the face and another horrible thought flashed across her mind. Running downstairs to her own bedroom, where little Daisy lay, she opened the drawer in which she had left the money drawn from the bank! It was gone.

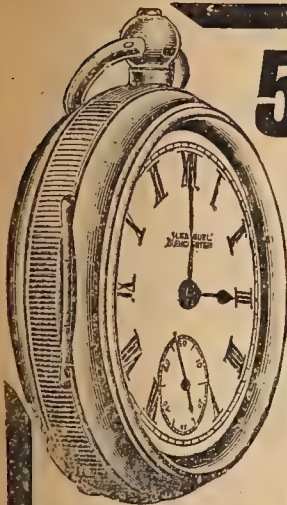
"They were thieves! They have lived on us and robbed us in the midst of our trouble. I told her of the money yesterday, when she was inquiring so kindly about us!" wailed Edie. "They have contrived to go away with all that they could get out of the house easily, in a portmanteau—he did that while she kept me engaged yesterday, and perhaps this morning—and she has finished up by robbing us!"

Edie did what she could for the little one till Rob came home in the evening, and then they tried bravely to face the bitter trouble, strong in the love they bore to each other.

"The easiest way to raise money is by a bill of sale on the furniture," said Rob, "and I'll arrange for that to-morrow. It's better than pawning a few things; people know nothing about it and we can pull round when I get my chance!"

A strange feeling went through him, and he gazed at Edie. The sympathy between these loving hearts caused the same sentiment to arise in both at the same time. His chance! His vocation! Had they made a mistake? They gazed steadfastly in each other's eyes

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ful, and all to whom I recommend it
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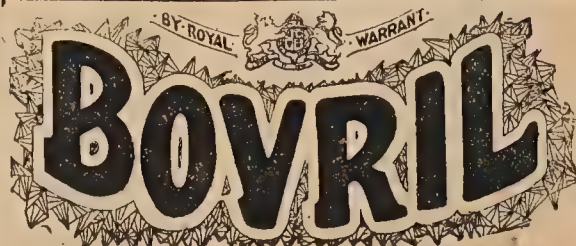
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(No. 459.)

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MARRY

WHEN

TO

MARRY

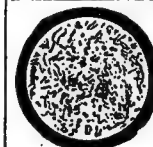
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"Perhaps I have," said Rob slowly, as if in reply to a question from her.

"Perhaps we have, Rob," she corrected gently. "If there is any blame we bear it together, for I have done as much as you. Were we wrong to leave the old place? Was our vocation there, after all?"

"We must face it now, dear," said he gently. "I have a little money left, to buy what Daisy requires, and the bill of sale will relieve us."

The matter was quickly arranged, and all bills paid, but that left them with scarcely anything to go on with, for they had raised only sufficient to cover pressing needs and they had sharks to deal with. Daisy recovered, but she remained very weak and the doctor nearly broke their hearts by telling them that she ought to be taken to the country.

The time went swiftly; expenses were running up, no fresh lodgers came and the prospect they had to face was black.

"If we go on like this much longer, Edie," said Rob desperately, one evening, "we shall be sold up. We can't meet the rent and other expenses, I can't get any more money out of those people for the furniture—they even talk of selling us up, and I fancy that our firm are going to reduce the staff. There hasn't been much to do lately. Edie, I think—I feel—that I—made a mistake! My vocation is not here, but on the farm. Can you ever forgive me, dearest, for bringing you to this?"

"My dear husband, I share it all with you. We were wrong, both of us. Now, for dear Daisy's sake, we must confess our error and try to remedy it. Perhaps grandfather will not be too hard on us! Our little Daisy will fade away if we stay here and—oh, Rob!—that would be too dreadful!"

Her strength failed and she burst into hysterical weeping. Rob comforted her and together they planned the way of the penitent.

"No, it is not fair that you should go to grandfather alone and bear the brunt of it!" declared Edie. "I'll write and ask him to come here if he still loves me, and then—"

The letter was dispatched and Fulton answered it in person.

"Grandfather," said Edie contritely, "we have seen our fault and we—"

Old Fulton's keen glance had taken in the situation, and he stopped her with a hearty kiss.

"It's rather hard work for an old man to look after two farms, and I shall be quite thankful to have someone at The Elms again," he remarked, trying to appear unconcerned.

"Rob, my boy,"—turning to him—"I've managed to get that other field added to The Elms land, so you'll have plenty to do!"

Rob wrung the old man's hand, unable to speak. Old Fulton created a diversion by going to the cradle and trying to make the baby laugh by snapping his fingers.

"You had better come with me straight away," said Fulton, a little later. "Let the sharks have the furniture, and I'll see to the rent and all that. Let us get out of it at once and begin again!"

They did so. Years have slipped by since then and old Fulton lies at rest in the village churchyard. Rob knows what his vocation is, and Edie and he wonder how they could have been so deluded in the early days. Daisy and other children are there to make them happy, and they are thankful.

"What could be better than this?" asked Rob, as he surveyed the fields and the children romping in the distance. "We had a rough time up there, dear, but it might have been a great deal worse. We learnt a lesson that we ought never to have needed, and the cost of it was not so heavy as we deserved it to be!"

"Love softened it, as love always does lighten trouble!" said Edie, and he clasped her in a warm embrace.

George Day.

MABEL: "I had a handsome young man at my feet yesterday." Amy: "Yes, I noticed you had bought a pair of new shoes."

LADY (on leaving crowded carriage): "Well, I'm glad to get out of the crowd. I've had to stand on one foot all the way." Voice from the corner: "Yes, and that foot was mine."

YOUNG LADY: "I should like to embroider a nice pair of slippers as a Christmas present for my aunt." Shopman: "We happen to be quite out of new patterns just now. Wouldn't something else do as well?" Young Lady: "Perhaps a cigar-case."



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SHE: "Read me something from your paper." He: "Certainly, my love. Here's something that will interest you. 'Rumoured engagement.'" She: "How lovely. Wonder if I know them?" He (continuing): "Fourteen killed on the Bulgarian frontier." She: "Wretch!"

Two young London ladies in the country were standing by the side of a wide ditch, which they did not know how to cross. They appealed for help to a boy who was coming along the road, whereupon he pointed behind them with a startled air, and yelled: "Snakes!" The young ladies each crossed the ditch at a single bound.



By Madge Morris.

[I shall be glad to answer, to the best of my ability, any letters from readers dealing with affairs of the heart, tangles in domestic life, or

points of etiquette. All communications must be addressed to me personally, c/o the Editor of SHORT STORIES.]

Melting an Iceberg.

"ALEC" sees his sweetheart three times a week. Very often, however, she is quite cold to him, and appears to take very little interest in his visit, while at other times she is warmth itself. What should "ALEC" do on the former occasions?

"ALEC" should visit her less often, say only twice a week. Let him miss a visit or two, and see if this does not remove the occasional coldness. A little judicious neglect is the best way to make a girl appreciative of the attentions of her lover. Too much devotion makes many girls capricious and petulant.

Too Much Housework.

"CAN you give me a cure for fat hands and arms?" writes "L. M. D." "I have to do all the housework at home, and my friends make fun of my red and ugly hands. Please help me."

I am afraid you cannot get over your difficulty unless by a change of work. So long as you have to do all the housework, your hands must continue to be coarse. Had you taken proper precautions at first, you might have avoided it. By handling things in a careless way, constantly lifting heavy weights, and having the hands frequently in water and in contact with soap, they swell and grow inflated. There is nothing for it, "L. M. D.," so long as your present work continues. But still, I do not doubt that when the young man arrives, he will readily forgive this defect, when he remembers what a useful little woman it is that suffers from it.

Should He Put it Out?

A QUESTION of etiquette comes from "JOHN H." It is, "Should a gentleman put out his cigar when a lady meets him in the street?" That depends on the quality of the cigar, and how far he has smoked it. If it is one of those given him by a kind friend who is not a judge of cigars, and the lady is one whom he wishes to impress favourably, I should advise him to throw it away. The same rule might be observed if the cigar were more than half smoked, as to cling longingly to a stump suggests to her mind that a cigar is a luxury he longs to linger over. But if he has just lighted it and it is a good cigar, likely to impress the lady, he should say, "Do you mind my smoking, Miss C.?" To which she will reply, if she has caught a wayward fume from a good Havana, "Of course not, I like it." In which case, "JOHN H." should continue for a few minutes talking, and resume his walk.

I might add, however, that unless a lady has something very important to say to a gentleman, it would be rather better form for her not to stop him in the street, and put him under the possible obligation of extinguishing even a bad cigar.

Kissing in Public.

"ENA" was recently accused of the heinous crime of kissing her sweetheart in public. They were riding in a railway carriage at the time, and were caught in the act by a lady friend, who upbraided "ENA" for her conduct. "Surely, if we are engaged," writes she, "we may kiss when and where we like?"

No, "ENA." No doubt you and your lover are very lucky in each other's possession, but to parade one's good fortune is the act of vulgarity. In public, you should disguise your feelings towards each other so far as possible, as displays of them only annoy other people, perhaps less fortunate. Wait till you are alone and unobserved next time, and the enjoyment should be ever so much greater. Everybody feels kindly towards the loving couple, but nobody wants to see their love too much in evidence in public.

A Point of Etiquette.

"SMIKE" wishes to know if a gentleman should assist a lady to get over a stile, or should he walk on a few yards and wait?

Having got over the stile himself, he might say, "Can you manage?" And if she agrees—which she will unless an invalid or cripple—he should walk on and interest himself in the vegetation.

The Acquaintanceship's Problem.

"I HAVE fallen in love," writes "GEORGE F.," "with a young lady whom I meet every day. How can I become acquainted with her. I don't know whether she cares for me or no. She is in business at a West End florist's."

I select this particular letter asking this question from a bunch of similar ones, because I am better able to answer it. "GEORGE F." is much better off than his fellow inquirers, as the girl is at a florist's. Now, "GEORGE," just go in every morning, or evening, or at lunch time, or whenever you can, and buy yourself a nice buttonhole. In time, perhaps, she will have got to pin it in for you so nicely that you will be positively compelled to say pretty things to her, after which, don't you know, all is a matter of good fortune. Certainly where there is a flower, there's a way.

Deception—Its Cure.

"I HAVE always been a flirt," writes "DELIRIOUS," "but now I have met a man whom I love dearly. I think he returns my love. When I first met him, I told him I lived with my people. Instead of that I am only a companion to a lady. Now I am afraid to tell him the truth."

This is a difficult problem. It was very silly of you to tell him a falsehood, especially one which was so unnecessary. If you think he is fond of you, tell him the truth now, and don't prevaricate any longer. Admit that you deceived him, and if he is fond of you he will probably forgive you.

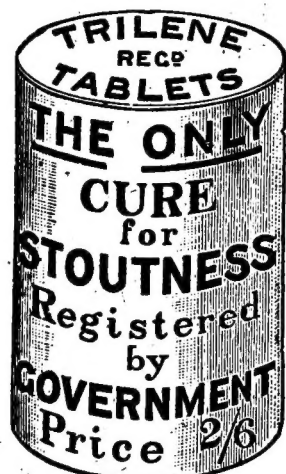
Curiosity.

I TAKE the opportunity of telling the two correspondents who write to inquire whether the gentleman referred to in my answer to "VEILCHEN," is either of them, that they have not that honour. At the same time, if they find themselves in similar positions to this individual, such advice as I have been able to give in the affair in question is at their disposal if they care to use it. Briefly it is that if a man is really attracted to a girl, he can never hope to carry matters further unless he makes some effort to become acquainted with her. Obviously it is no part of a girl's duty to manoeuvre an acquaintanceship, and unless the man takes the initiative, things can go no further.

ALL FAT PEOPLE

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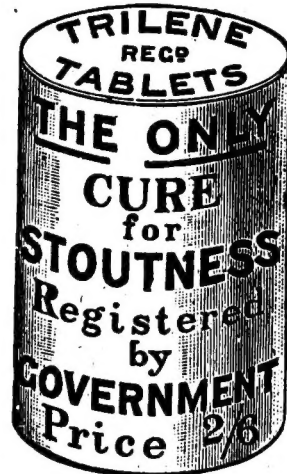
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"57 Alexandra Road, Norwich, October 19th, 1896.
Gentlemen,—In reference to Trilene Tablets, I may say that my wife found the greatest possible benefit from the use of them; their action was rapid, and exceeded our utmost expectations, as they were also most beneficial to the respiratory organs. My wife was many years growing so stout, but although the disease was, I consider chronic, the Tablets soon reduced the same completely.
Yours faithfully, J. R. CANHAM."

COUNTESS SECKENDORFF, of Berlin, writes: "The Tablets greatly benefited me personally, and I am recommending them to friends."

MISS CHATTERTON, 7 Salisbury Villas, Banstead, Surrey, says: "I weighed 12st. 5lb., but am now 11st., and getting much better."

Nurse CROUCHER, at Mrs. Bennett's, 14 Buckleigh Road, Streatham, says: "I lost 5lb. from the box I took."

Mrs. D. BURTON, of Silverleigh, Tunbridge, writes: "I am very pleased with difference in size, my friends all telling me how much thinner I am getting."

MISS NORTHLEDGE, The Laurels, Elsieholm Road, Lincoln, says: "The Tablets reduced me 1st., so that I am cured."

Mr. WM. USHER says: "A sister of mine, who was 17st., was greatly reduced by your Tablets to 15st."

Extract from *The Lady*, September 3rd, 1896: "Many stout persons have suffered untold agonies in unavailing efforts to reduce their bulk, either by means of severe dieting, or by taking more or less deleterious drugs; but all these pains would have been saved if they had only invested in a box of the wonderful Trilene Tablets, which are quite harmless, containing neither mercury, arsenic, nor any other mineral poison, and which are an unfailing cure for obesity."

MRS. T. BOSTON, Cambridge Villas, Clifford Street, South Wigston, says: "I congratulate you on your wonderful Tablets. My weight at first starting them was 11st. 7lb., and I now weigh 9st. 11lb."

Mr. McLEOD, 44 Caliste, Paisley, writes: "I have been cured. If you want to know my weight now, it is 10st.; reduced 1st. 5lb., and I am quite content."

COUNT ESKERWALD, of Ljatorp, Sweden, writes, 8th Oct., 1899: "The person who took Tablets lost 18lb. during the cure."

Mr. GIBBS, 147 Richmond Park, Kimberworth, Rotherham, says: "Since I began with them they have reduced me 2st. 3lb., and I am pleased to say I am a great deal better in health and in every way."

Mrs. FENTON, 11 Wood Street, Tyldesley, writes: "Been fat all my life, but now your Tablets tell a tale. I have lost 17lb. already and am delighted."

Mrs. MARY WILLIAMS, of Old Yard, near Redol, Bagliff, Wales, writes Nov. 22nd, 1888: "Your Tablets reduced me 2st., and have benefited me greatly."

A. M. PRATT, of Ongar House, Ongar, says: "My weight is so much reduced it is unnecessary to take more. The reduction of weight was from 12st. 6lb. to 10st. 4lb."

Mrs. H. COX, 28 Watnall Road, Hucknall Torkard, writes: "The box of Tablets has reduced my weight 1½ stones."

Mrs. PEARCE, Armstrong Road, Benwell, writes: "Reduced from 12st. to 9st., and do not get any heavier."

Col. SGT. WHITTLE, of East Lancashire Regt., Burnley, Lancs., says: "A man in our regiment in 1891 lost several stone from taking your Tablets."

Mrs. ROLLITT, of North Farm, Letwell, says: "Tablets have done a world of good—reduced 14lb. already without altering diet."

Mrs. W. A. RADFORD, of High Street, New Brinsley, Eastwood, writes: "Before taking Tablets I was 46 inches round waist, now I am 32 inches. I hope soon to be 28. I could hardly move or get up, now I get about easily. Please use this as you wish."

Countess FURSTENBERG, of Germany, writes: "They act speedily and well."

The Princess LIECHTENSTEIN writes from Landsberg, Austria: "Pray send me your excellent Tablets."

Mrs. WEAVER, of Greenpits Villa, Ross, Hereford, writes: "I am reduced from 11st. 5lb. to 11st. You may use this if you like."

Mrs. CROSSLEY, of Rose Hill, Torver, nr. Coniston, says: "There is a very decided diminution of fat. I am delighted, and cannot speak too highly in praise of Tablets. My heart is better, and I can breathe so much easier. You may refer to me as often as you like."

Lady C. CONRAD writes from Wiesbaden: "I am very pleased with your Tablets."

MISS JANE CARTER of Forthampton House, Tewkesbury, says: "The Tablets are of the greatest value. I am reduced many stone, and shall be pleased to recommend them."

Mr. THOS BLAKELY, of 57 The Grove, Bedford, writes: "I have lost a little over 4lb. since taking your Tablets, and my case causes much local interest."

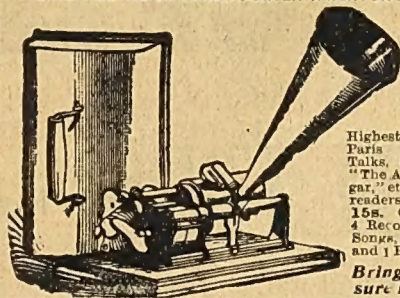
Miss F. L. BALL, 47 Chesterfield Road, St. Andrews, Bristol, writes: "I am quite cured through your Tablets. They improve the figure, and greatly relieve shortness of breath."

Miss PATIENT, of Woodberry, Theydon Bois, writes: "Feel great benefit from Tablets. I have lost 2st., and am sufficiently reduced."

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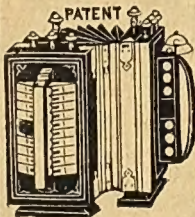
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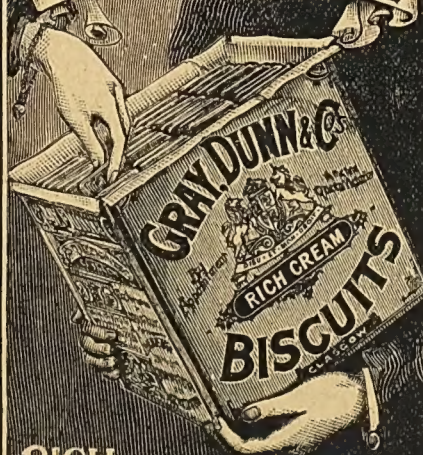
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